NATION

At ₹1.35 lakh cr, this is the costliest election ever

≫ Page: 8 ≪

BUSINESS

Kotak Bank shares tank 13 pc post RBI action

≫ Page: 11 ≪

SPORTS

AIFF records historic rise in women football

≫ Page:12 ≪

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Carry these when you go out to vote

If your name is in voters' list, carry Electors Photo Identification Card (EPIC) when you go to your polling both. If you can't produce original EPIC card, then you can show one of the 10 approved identity documents

- Passport
- Driving Licence
- Passbooks with photograph issued by Bank/Post Office
- Aadhaar Card
- Pan card
- Smart Card issued by RGI (Registrar General of India) under National Population Register (NPR)
- MNREGA Job Card (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee)
- Health Insurance Smart Card issued under the scheme of Ministry of Labour
- Pension document with photograph; official identity cards issued to |MPs/MLAs/MLCs
- Service Identity Cards with photograph issued to employees by Central/State Govt/PSUs/Public Limited Companies

HOW TO VOTE

POLLING TIME

7am to 6pm

How to find your polling booth?

1. https://electoralsearch.eci.gov.in
2. Call **1950** (add your STD code before dialling)
3. Chunavana mobile app

- Polling official will check your name on the voter list and check your ID
- Official will ink your finger, give you a slip and take your signature on a register (Form 17A)
- Deposit the slip with third official and show your inked finger
- Record your vote by pressing the ballot button opposite the symbol of the candidate on Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). You will hear a beep
- Check the slip that appears in the transparent window of the VVPAT machine. The slip with the Candidate serial No., Name and Symbol shall be visible for 7 seconds before it drops in the sealed VVPAT box
- Mobile phones, cameras or any other gadget is not allowed in a polling booth

>>>See election Pages 2,3,4,5&8

EC notice to BJP, Cong over Modi, RaGa speeches

This is the 1st time EC has taken note of plaint against PM

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Election Commission on Thursday issued a notice to BJP President JP Nadda on Opposition charge that Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a divisive speech in Rajasthan's Banswara.

This is the first time EC has taken cognisance of a model code violation complaint against a prime minister, Separately, the poll panel also issued a notice to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, asking him to respond to the complaints filed by BJP against him and Rahul Gandhi regarding their remarks.

In the notice sent to Nadda, the Election Commission sought his response by Monday to the complaints filed by the Congress, CPI, CPI (ML) and civil society groups regarding the remarks made by Modi on 21 April in Banswara.

These complaints had referred to Modi's allegations that the Congress wanted to redistribute the wealth of the people to Muslims and that the opposition party won't even spare the 'mangalsutra' of women.

Election Commission sought Nadda's response by Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

The speech led to a major political slugfest with Congress and other opposition parties accusing him of making false claims and BJP alleging that the Congress was nursing an agenda of Muslim appeasement at the cost of weaker sections of the society.

EC also asked Nadda to bring to the notice of all star campaigners of the party to "set high standards of political discourse and observe provisions of model code of conduct in letter and spirit".

The poll panel also said that campaign speeches made by those holding high positions have more serious consequences.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, EC had given a clean chit to Modi on complaints lodged by the Opposition parties.

According to the poll panel, it has taken a view that while individual star campaigners would continue to remain responsible for speeches made by them, the Commission will address party chiefs "on a case-to-case basis".

Recently, Kharge was asked to explain remarks made by two of his party leaders against women.

The poll authority issued a similarly-worded notice separately to the Congress President with regard to allegations levelled by the BJP against him and Gandhi.

EC notices to the two-party presidents did not directly name either Modi, Gandhi or Kharge. BJP, on the other hand, had written to EC that Gandhi levelled malafide allegations against Modi during a speech in Kottayam, Kerala where he alleged that the Prime Minister was pushing for one nation, one language, one religion. It also accused Kharge of violating the model code by claiming that he was not invited to the Ram temple consecration ceremony due to discrimination against SCs and STs. *—PTI*

23-yr-old woman gangraped in B'luru

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

A 23-year-old woman was kidnapped and subjected to gangrape in High Ground's police station limits on Thursday. The victim was forcibly abducted at 8am by five men, including her lover, who sexually assaulted her in an isolated location. The victim hailed from Chitradurga, and was staying in a paying guest. After initial investigation police nabbed the accused. A case has been registered under section 376D of IPC. This incident came into light just a day before the phase two Lok Sabha Elections in Bengaluru. In another case, a 6-year-old was brutally raped in Medahalli under KR Puram police station. The accused was identified as Mamajan from West Bengal. A POCSO case has been registered.

—Salar News

- The victim hailed from Chitradurga, and was staying in a paying guest. After initial investigation police nabbed the accused. A case has been registered under section 376D of IPC

BENGAL GOVT TO PAY SALARIES AFTER HC VERDICT

KOLKATA, 25 APRIL

West Bengal government on Thursday said it will pay the salaries for April to 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff in state government-sponsored and aided schools whose appointments were cancelled by a Calcutta High Court order.

"Since they have worked for almost the entire April, we have decided to pay their salaries for the month," the official told PTI.

The state government, which has moved Supreme Court challenging the order, is also mulling paying salaries to the teachers and non-teaching staff until the apex court gives its verdict. Calcutta High Court on Monday ordered the cancellation of appointments of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff made through the recruitment process of State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools, declaring the selection process as "null and void".

High Court said those appointed outside the officially available 24,640 vacancies, after the expiry of the official date of recruitment, and those who submitted blank Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) sheets but obtained appointment, to return all remunerations and benefits received by them with 12 per cent interest per annum within four weeks.

—PTI

India a challenging economy for IP protection: US

WASHINGTON, 25 APRIL

India remains "one of the world's most challenging" major economies with respect to the protection and enforcement of intellectual property (IP), the Biden Administration said as it placed the country on the Priority Watch List on its 2024 Special 301 Report. India along with Argentina, Chile, China, Indonesia, Russia and Venezuela have been placed on the 2024 Special 301 Report on the adequacy and effectiveness of US trading partners' protection and enforcement of IP rights released by the US Trade Representative. These countries will be the subject of particularly intense bilateral engagement during the coming year, USTR said. USTR removed the Dominican Republic from the Watch List this year. The "Special 301" Report is an annual review of the global state of IP protection and enforcement. *—PTI*

Gehlot behind phone tapping of Pilot: Official

JAIPUR, 25 APRIL

Ashok Gehlot's ex-OSD Lokesh Sharma on Wednesday claimed that the clip of an alleged telephone conversation between Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and some Congress leaders on "toppling" state's Congress government in 2020 was given to him by the former chief minister.

Sharma's claim marks a shift from his previous stand that he had got three clips from social media and forwarded those to news organisations.

Sharma on Wednesday also accused Gehlot of hatching a conspiracy to tarnish the image of Shekhawat and the then-deputy chief minister Sachin Pilot.

Sharma alleged he was assured full cooperation by Gehlot when a case was registered against him. However, he was neglected and faced mental torture due to the case and the questioning.

Ashok Gelhot and Sachin Pilot **PHOTO: PTI**

"On 16 July, 2020, the then-chief minister came to Hotel Fairmont where Congress MLAs of his camp were staying following the political crisis. He left the hotel around 4pm. Later, I got a call from Gehlot's PSO Ramniwas that he was calling me to Chief Minister's residence," Sharma said. "When I reached, Gehlot gave me this pen drive having three audio clips and a paper with a transcript of the clips. He asked me to circulate those to the media," he added.

He said he felt used by Gehlot and sidelined when the former chief minister's objective of "saving his chair" was fulfilled.

Accusing Gehlot of being involved in REET paper leak, Sharma said the veteran Congress leader played with the futures of lakhs of youngsters and is now concerned only about the future of his son. *—PTI*

More than 2.88 cr voters are eligible to vote **PHOTO: PTI**

Karnataka votes in its 1st phase today

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

Congress and BJP will lock horns on the electoral battleground again, in less than a year, in Karnataka as the stage is set for voting in the first phase in 14 Lok Sabha seats on Friday.

It's going to be a straight fight between ruling Congress and BJP-JD(S) combine unlike Assembly elections in May last year which witnessed a triangular contest among the three parties. The State has a total of 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The second phase of polling in the remaining 14 seats is on 7 May. A total of 247 candidates — 226 men and 21 women — are in the fray for the first phase in most of the southern and coastal districts.

More than 2.88 crore voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in 30,602 polling stations where polling will take place between 7am to 6pm. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Foreign vloggers allegedly sexually harassed in Kerala

THRISSUR, 25 APRIL

A foreign vlogger couple, known for their viral travel videos, has alleged that they faced sexual harassment at iconic Thrissur Pooram in Kerala which concluded last week. American-English vlogger couple Mackenzie and Keenan posted in their Instagram page yesterday a video that shows a man attempting to forcefully kiss Mackenzie after talking to her.

The video, titled 'Questionable Moments at Thrissur Pooram' also showed Keenan saying a man in his 50s sexually assaulted him and that the vlogger had to push him away. Meanwhile, Kerala police said they have not received any complaint from them in this regard. The narration in the video said they had a wonderful time at Thrissur Pooram, but there were also "some questionable moments". The video showed a man, who was interviewed by Mackenzie for her social media pages, attempting to kiss her. *—PTI*

- The video, titled 'Questionable Moments at Thrissur Pooram' also showed Keenan saying a man in his 50s sexually assaulted him and that the vlogger had to push him away

THE TRUTH ABOUT MODI'S CLAIMS

Opposition parties have accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of hate speeches against Muslims as he targeted Congress' manifesto. He called Muslims 'infiltrators' and 'people with more kids'. From mangalsutra to quota, he is accused of making false claims about Cong's manifesto. Here is what he claims and what manifesto says

PS: Congress manifesto does not mention Muslim or any other religion

What Modi said

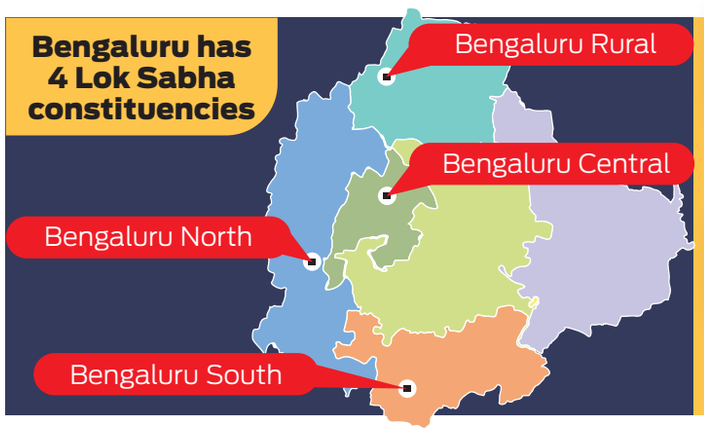
- "Congress manifesto says they will calculate the gold with mothers and sisters, get information about it and then distribute that property. They will distribute it to whom? Manmohan Singh's government had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets. It will be distributed to infiltrators."
- "They won't even leave your mangalsutras. If Congress forms government, a survey of property belonging to every person will be done. It will be checked how much gold our sisters own."
- "Congress will snatch more than half of people's earnings via inheritance tax."
- "Congress wants to snatch reservation of SCs/STs/OBCs for the sake of its Muslim vote-bank."
- "Congress has been hatching a conspiracy to deprive tribals and backward classes of their rights."

What Congress manifesto says

- Congress will conduct socio-economic and Caste Census. It vows to address growing inequalities of income. Manmohan Singh had said their priority is "agriculture, irrigation, water resources, health, education, critical investment in rural infrastructure.... upliftment of SC/STs".
- Congress will establish an authority to monitor the distribution of government land and surplus land to the poor under the Land Ceiling Act.
- Congress has promised Rs 1 lakh per year to poor women.
- Congress promises amendment to raise 50% cap on quota for SC, ST and OBC but does not say it will all be given to Muslims.
- It also promises 10% in jobs and educational institutions for EWS for all castes and communities.

It's a heated battle in Namma IT City

At least 1 cr voters will decide the fate of veterans Rajeev Gowda and Shobha Karandlaje in North B'luru, educationist and Muslim leader Mansoor Ali Khan and Hindutva firebrand PC Mohan in Central, a doctor and DyCM's brother in Rural and youths Tejasvi Surya and Sowmya Reddy in South B'luru



Voting Day: 26 April

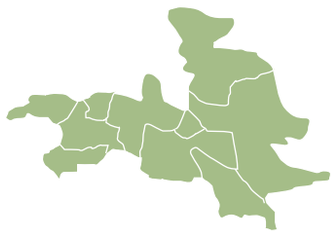
Results: 4 June

Most educated candidate	Richest candidate	Most criminal cases
Rajeev Gowda (Congress)	**DK Suresh** (Congress): ₹593 crore	**Sowmya Reddy** (Congress): 6
PhD (Public Policy & Management)		

Will Bengaluru elect a woman MP this time?

Bengaluru has seen 17 Lok Sabha elections in the past 73 years, yet no woman has been elected as an MP. However, in the upcoming elections, both Congress and BJP have nominated women candidates - Sowmya Reddy for Bengaluru South and Shobha Karandlaje for Bengaluru North - respectively. If either wins, Bengaluru will have its first woman representative in Lok Sabha

BENGALURU CENTRAL



8 Assembly segments

Sarvagnanagar, CV Raman Nagar, Shivajinagar, Shanti Nagar, Gandhi Nagar, Rajajinagar, Chamrajpet and Mahadevapura.

TOTAL VOTERS

23.98 LAKHS

About the constituency

It was established in 2008 after delimitation. It is dominated by minorities such as Tamils, Telugus, Muslims and Christians. Since 2009, this has been BJP & PC Mohan's bastion. Spanning from slums to Central Business District, it serves as a microcosm of the IT industry. Mahadevapura is a hub for software firms, while Shivajinagar and Gandhinagar are commercial centres.

Key issues

Mahadevapura, Sarvagnanagar and CV Raman Nagar have limited Cauvery water supply, poor street lighting and irregular garbage collection.

During monsoons, flooding occurs in low-lying areas. Bellandur & Varthur lakes are heavily polluted, often experiencing frothing.

MANSOOR ALI KHAN (51)

CONGRESS

Community: Muslim

Education: Bachelor of Business Management

Assets: ₹**97** cr

Native: Bengaluru

Criminal Charges: 1

PC MOHAN (60)

BJP

Community: OBC

Education: 2nd PUC

Assets: ₹**112.12** cr

Native: Bengaluru

Criminal Charges: 2

Criminal cases and assets over 5 years

Criminal Cases		Assets	
2019	2024	2019	2024
NIL	4	₹75.55 cr	₹112.12 cr

TOTAL POLLS SO FAR: 3

WINS

3 BJP	0 CONG

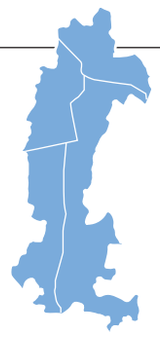
2019 RESULTS

Winner: PC Mohan (BJP)
6.02 L votes

Loser: Rizwan Arshad (Congress)
5.31 L votes

Voter turnout: 54.29%

BENGALURU NORTH



8 Assembly segments

KR Puram, Byatarayanapura, Dasarahalli, Mahalakshmi Layout, Yeshwanthpur, Malleshwaram, Hebbal and Pulakeshinagar.

TOTAL VOTERS

31.74 LAKHS

About the constituency

The constituency is predominantly inhabited by Vokkaligas. Bengaluru North was a stronghold of Congress for over 45 years, but in the last 15 years it has turned into a BJP bastion. This constituency has the most number of voters in the State. Emerging as the next IT hub of the City, the seat has the potential of providing 3.5 lakh new jobs by 2025.

Key issues

Byatarayanapura & KR Puram are facing severe water crisis for 16 yrs.

Poor road infra and lack of proper waste management has plagued Yeshwanthpur for 15 years.

Hebbal grapples with challenges such as connectivity issues, traffic congestion and stray dog populations.

SHOBHA KARANDLAJE (57)

BJP

Community: Vokkaliga

Education: MA (Sociology)

Assets: ₹**13.88** cr

Native: Puttur, Dakshina Kannada

Criminal Charges: 3

Criminal cases and assets over 5 years

Criminal Cases		Assets	
2019	2024	2019	2024
3	5	₹10.48 cr	₹13.89 cr

MV RAJEEV GOWDA (61)

CONGRESS

Community: Vokkaliga

Education: PhD (Public Policy & Management)

Assets: ₹**134.04** cr

Native: Bengaluru

Criminal Charges: Nil

TOTAL POLLS SO FAR: 17

WINS

12 CONG	4 BJP	1 JD(S)

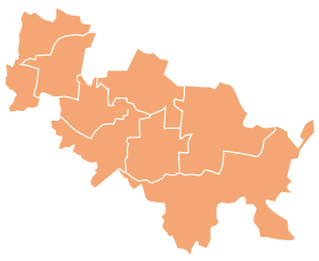
2019 RESULTS

Winner: DV Sadananda Gowda (BJP)
8.24 L votes

Loser: Krishna Byregowda (Congress)
6.76 L votes

Voter turnout: 54.66%

BENGALURU SOUTH



8 Assembly segments

Govindraj Nagar, Vijayanagar, Chickpet, Basavanagudi, Padmanabhanagar, BTM Layout, Jayanagar and Bommanahalli.

TOTAL VOTERS

23.17 LAKHS

About the constituency

Bengaluru South has been a stronghold of BJP for over 28 years with the only exception being in 1989 when Congress secured a victory. The constituency is predominantly inhabited by Brahmins. One of Bengaluru's most developed areas, it is known for the infrastructure and IT hubs but still has its old-world charm.

Key issues

The prevalence of flooding and drain overflow affects four out of the eight Assembly segments in the region, including Attiguppe Metro Station.

Traffic is a regular affair in Chickpet due to narrow roads. Improper garbage disposal plagues the area. Govindaraja Nagar ward suffered major damage during 2022 floods.

TEJASVI SURYA (33)

BJP

Community: Brahmin

Education: BAL and LLB From Bangalore Institute of Legal Studies

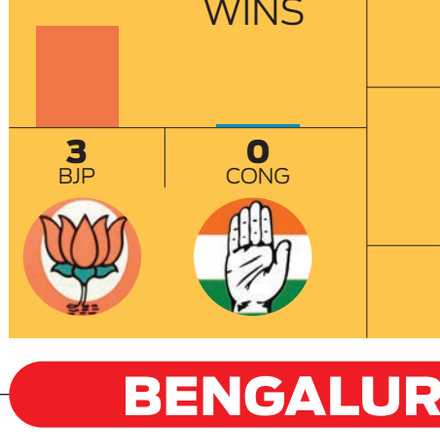
Assets: ₹**4.10** cr

Native: Chikkamagaluru

Criminal Charges: 3

Criminal cases and assets over 5 years

Criminal Cases		Assets	
2019	2024	2019	2024
NIL	3	₹13 lakh	₹4.10 cr



SOWMYA REDDY (41)

CONGRESS

Community: Vokkaliga

Education: Bachelor of Engineering

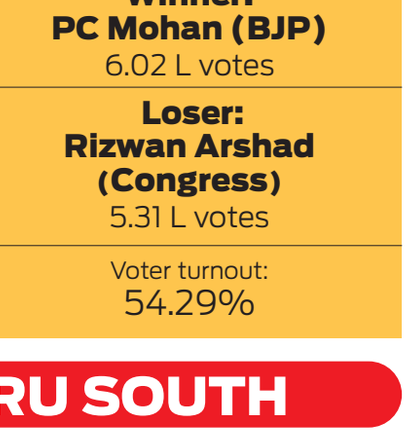
Assets: ₹**2.30** cr

Native: Bengaluru

Criminal Charges: 6

Criminal cases and assets over 5 years

Criminal Cases		Assets	
2019	2024	2019	2024
NIL	3	₹2 cr	₹4.10 cr



TOTAL POLLS SO FAR: 17

WINS

8 BJP	6 CONG	3 Janata Party

2019 RESULTS

Winner: Tejasvi Surya (BJP)
7.39 L votes

Loser: BK Hariprasad (Congress)
4.08 L votes

Voter turnout: 53.64%

BENGALURU RURAL

8 Assembly segments

Kunigal, Rajarajeshwarinagar, Bengaluru South, Anekal, Magadi, Ramanagara, Kanakapura and Channapatna.

TOTAL VOTERS

27.63 LAKHS

About the constituency

Bengaluru Rural is counted among the major Lok Sabha seats in the country with at least 27 lakh voters. This seat came into existence after the delimitation in 2008. Former CM and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy was the first MP from here. It is dominated by Vokkaliga community. Agriculture is a common occupation with focus on silk, rice, peanuts and sugarcane.

Key issues

Bommasandra-Jigani link road, a vital industrial corridor, lacks streetlights, continuity and drainage.

Despite plans for self-sustainable townships in Bidadi, Ramanagara, Kasaba, Sathanur, Solur, and Nandagudi, none of these projects have materialised for over a decade.

DR CN MANJUNATH (67)

BJP

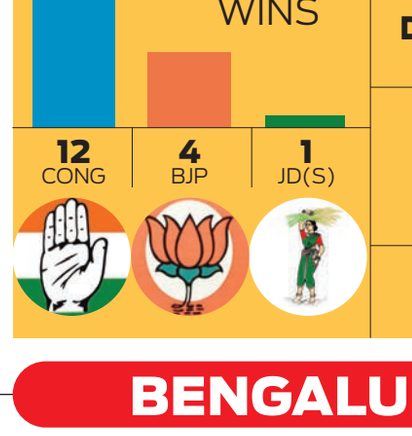
Community: Vokkaliga

Education: Doctor of Medicine in Cardiology, Kasturba Medical College of Mangaluru

Assets: ₹**43.64** cr

Native: Hassan

Criminal Charges: Nil



DK SURESH (57)

CONGRESS

Community: Vokkaliga

Education: 2nd PUC, Vivekananda College, Bengaluru

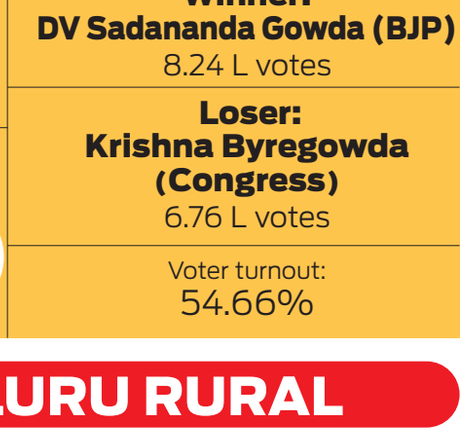
Assets: ₹**593** cr

Native: Bengaluru

Criminal Charges: 3

Criminal cases and assets over 5 years

Criminal Cases		Assets	
2019	2024	2019	2024
5	3	₹338 cr	₹593 cr



TOTAL POLLS SO FAR: 3

WINS

2 CONG	0 BJP	1 JD(S)

2019 RESULTS

Winner: DK Suresh (Congress)
8.78 L votes

Loser: Ashwathnarayan Gowda (BJP)
6.71 L votes

Voter turnout: 64.98%

Research: Anushree Chakraborty, Amina Afaq, Saptarshi, Aarati Krishna, Shreshtha Dutta, Subbalakshmi PR, Vaishnavi Gopalraj, Meghana Prasad | **Graphics:** Mahesh Kini & Vishwanatha G

Source: Election Commission of India, ADR

STAGE SET FOR SHOWDOWN IN STATE

14 out of 28 constituencies in K'taka are set to vote. What are the key fights to watch out for? Take a look.

CHIKKABALLAPUR

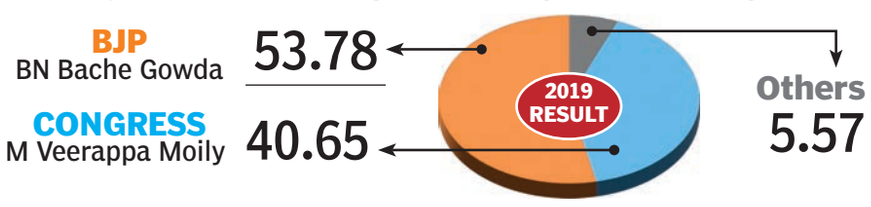
Assembly segments
Gauribidanur, Bagepalli, Chikkaballapur, Yelahanka, Hoskote, Devanahalli, Doddaballapur and Nelamangala.

Know your constituency
Chikkaballapur came into existence after 1977. It is the 35th most populated district in the country. Since 1977, a total of 12 elections have been held, of which Congress has won 10, and once each by Janata Dal and BJP.

Total voters: **19.6 lakh**
Male **9.7 lakh**
Female **9.8 lakh**
Others: **262**

KEY ISSUES

- **Persistent water woes**: Water issues have irked voters since 2009, including Yettinahole project that promised to bring Krishna River water to the district. Water crisis plagues Chikkaballapur with dry borewells leaving people as well as lands parched. The district is a major supplier of vegetables and fruits to Bengaluru, but due to water crisis farmers are hit this year.
- **Corruption in pandemic management**:- Cong has accused large-scale corruption during pandemic and is attacking Sudhakar, who was the health minister at that time, over it. BJP MLA Basangouda Patil Yatnal says Yediyurappa was involved in Rs 40,000cr corruption in Covid management.

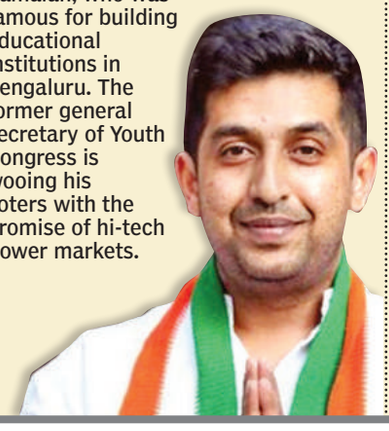


KEY PLAYERS

MS RAKSHA RAMAIAH (38)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 169 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	1
COMMUNITY:	BALIJA

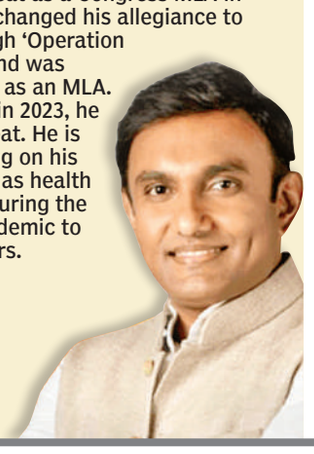
He is the son of former minister MR Seetharam and grandson of late MS Ramaiah, who was famous for building educational institutions in Bengaluru. The former general secretary of Youth Congress is wooing his voters with the promise of hi-tech flower markets.



K SUDHAKAR (50)

PARTY:	BJP
EDUCATION:	MBBS
ASSETS:	33.41 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	1
COMMUNITY:	VOKKALIGA

The former health minister won the seat as a Congress MLA in 2018, but changed his allegiance to BJP through 'Operation Kamala' and was re-elected as an MLA. However, in 2023, he lost the seat. He is now relying on his past work as health minister during the Covid pandemic to sway voters.



DAKSHINA KANNADA

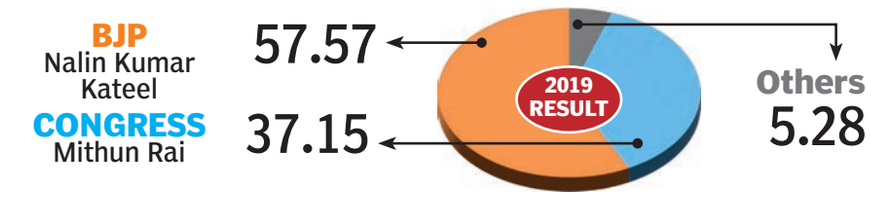
Assembly segments
Belthangady, Moodabidri, Mangaluru City North, Mangaluru City South, Bantval, Puttur, Sullia, Mangaluru.

Know your constituency
The last time Congress won from this place was 1989. BJP snatched the constituency from Congress in 1991. Hindus are the majority in this region. BJP has won this seat eight times consecutively.

Total voters: **17.9 lakh**
Male **8.76 lakh**
Female **9.19 lakh**
Others: **67**

KEY ISSUES

- **Farmers' issues:** Water scarcity has hit at least 39 villages and the region is declared as 'moderately drought-hit' area. Farmers have been protesting seeking MSP for coconut and arecanut.
- **Poor attendance in colleges**: Government degree colleges and post-graduate centres see less than 50% attendance of students. The same is the case in schools.



KEY PLAYERS

CAPTAIN BRIJESH CHOWTA (42)

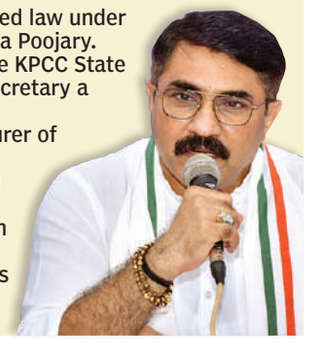
PARTY:	BJP
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	70 LAKH
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	BUNT

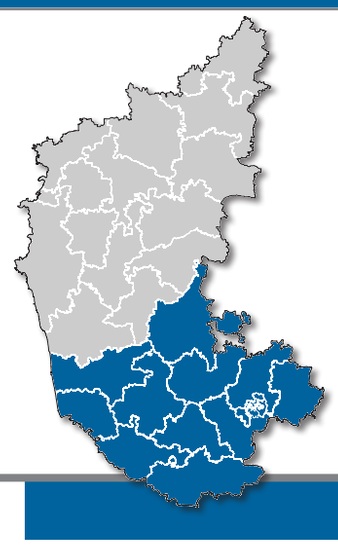
The Army veteran joined BJP in 2013. Currently, he serves as the State Secretary of BJP in Karnataka. His candidacy quelled anti-incumbency against incumbent MP Nalin Kumar Kateel. The newcomer vouches to promote Hindutva ideology and 'ensure development'.

PADMARAJ R POOJARY (53)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	LLB
ASSETS:	1.8 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	OBC

He practised law under Janardhana Poojary. He became KPCC State general secretary a year ago. The treasurer of Kudroli Gokarnath Temple is banking on Congress' guarantees to bag a win.





HASSAN

KEY ISSUES

- **Floods:** Lack of having proper drainage system is one of the biggest issues in the constituencies. Due to heavy rainfall the region also experience landslides
- **Water shortage:** The lack of permanent solution has been a major concern for the residents. Majority are still facing problems in irrigation, especially in coffee and areca nut plantations
- **BJP-JD(S) conflict**: BJP unit has appealed to its workers not to campaign for JD(S) leaders.

Assembly segments
Kadur, Shravanabelagola, Arsikere, Belur, Hassan, Holenarasipur, Arkalgud and Sakleshpur.

Know your constituency
Hassan is JD(S) bastion and Vokkaliga stronghold. Congress does not have a stronghold in Hassan of 8 Assembly segments, it has only won 2. Additionally, Deve Gowda and Puttaswamy Gowda's rivalry over Hassan is at least 30 to 40 years old and now the grandsons will take the rivalry ahead. Holenarsipur seat is JD(S) bastion.

KEY PLAYERS

PRAJWAL REVANNA (33)

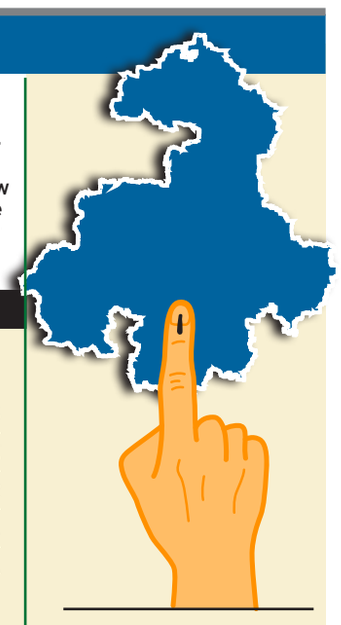
PARTY:	JD(S)
EDUCATION:	BE MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
ASSETS:	RS 40.84 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	VOKKALIGA

In 2014, he discontinued his MTech course in Australia to assist his grandfather HD Deve Gowda with the 2014 general election in Hassan. In 2015, he was among the 10 young aspiring politicians in India to be chosen by Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. He is the incumbent MP

SHREYAS M PATEL (31)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 39 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	1
COMMUNITY:	VOKKALIGA

Patel, grandson of former minister late G Puttaswamy Gowda, lost the Holenarasipur seat to former minister and five-time MLA Prajwal Revanna, grandson of former prime minister HD Deve Gowda



Total Population: **17.2 lakh**
Male **8.5 lakh**
Female **8.6 lakh**
Others: **41**

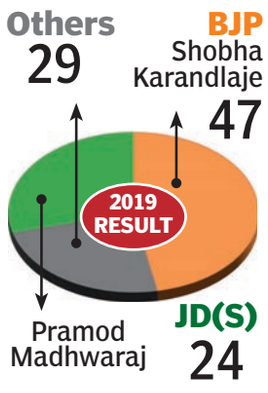
UDUPI-CHIKKAMAGALURU

Assembly segments
Kundapura, Udupi, Kapu, Karkal, Sringeri, Mudigere, Chikmagalur, Tarikere.

Know your constituency
Until delimitation in 2008, Udupi and Chikkamagaluru were separate. BJP has been winning since 2004 general elections. Only in 2012, Congress candidate K Jayaprakash Hegde won. The communally sensitive region saw a massive controversy in 2020 when Muslim girls were prohibited wearing hijab in a govt college. Kaup villagers have decided to boycott this elections due to poor civic amenities.

KEY ISSUES

- **Unemployment:** Non-starters of environment friendly industries, migration of youth abroad in search of jobs is a key concern in this district.
- **Merger of Konkan railways with Indian Railways:** Impending merger for better connectivity is another key issue since 1990s. The merger would help expedite developmental works, paving way for more passenger's trains.

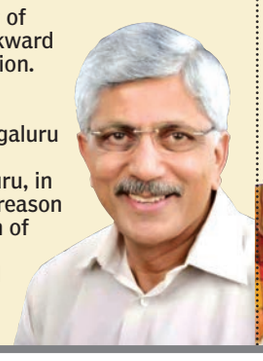


KEY PLAYERS

K JAYAPRAKASH HEGDE (71)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 15 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	BUNT

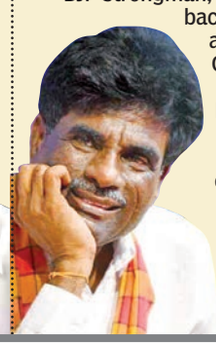
He is Chairman of Karnataka Backward Class Commission. As Minister in-charge of undivided Mangaluru and Chikkamangaluru, in 1997, he is the reason for the creation of Udupi district, from undivided Mangaluru and Udupi.

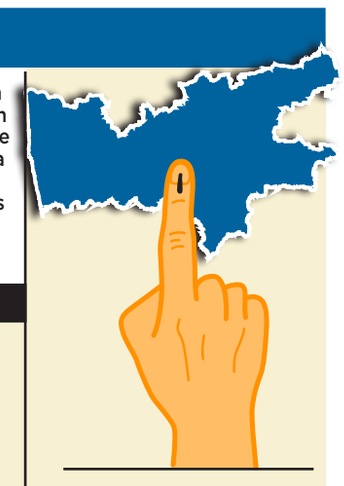


KOTA SRINIVAS POOJARY (64)

PARTY:	BJP
EDUCATION:	5TH PASS
ASSETS:	RS 2.9 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	1
COMMUNITY:	OBC

BJP strongman, who is also from the backward class. He was also the leader of the Council. He is hoping to capitalise on the Modi wave. Recently the Kaup police have registered a case against Poojary for Poll code violation. Congress is banking on Hegde's popularity.





Total Population: **15.72 lakh**
Male **7.62 lakh**
Female **8.10 lakh**
Others: **38**

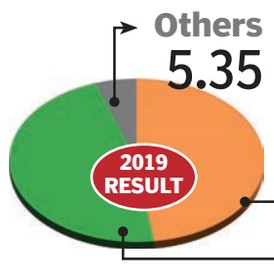
TUMAKURU

Assembly segments
Chiknayakanhalli, Tiptur, Turuvekere, Tumakuru City, Tumakuru Rural, Koratagere, Gubbi, and Madhugiri.

Know your constituency
Congress, BJP and JD(S), all have a stronghold on the constituency. After BJP and JD(S) alliance many Muslim leaders have now moved to Congress. In 2019 elections, BJP's GS Basavaraj emerged victorious. Cong repre-sents 2 constituencies while BJP, JD(S) have 2 each.

KEY ISSUES

- **Farmers dispute:** Farmers here claim the Forest Department has taken over 700 hectares of their land. In March 2023, clashes erupted when farmers questioned a departmental survey. A clash also broke out between officials and farmers.
- **Soil mining:** Hundreds of acres of land has been damaged due to soil mining. Bluish-green water stagnates at the mining pits.
- **River water issue**: Deputy CM DK Shivakumar announced that Tumakuru's lifeline Hemavathi river water would be diverted to Majadi via Kunigal. A foundation ceremony was laid for Hemavathi express link canal, which left residents fuming.

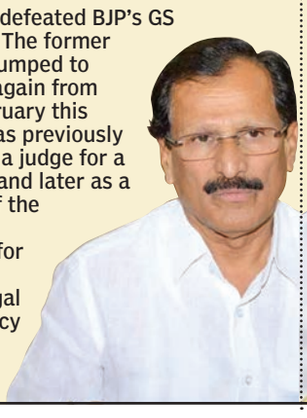


KEY PLAYERS

SP MUDDAHANUMEGOWDA (69)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	LLB
ASSETS:	RS 9 CR
CRIMINAL	CASES: NIL
COMMUNITY:	VOKKALIGA

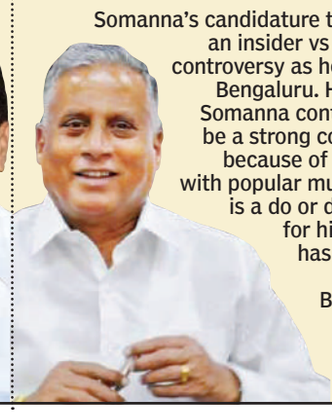
In 2014 he defeated BJP's GS Basavaraj. The former advocate jumped to Congress again from BJP in February this year. He has previously worked as a judge for a few years and later as a member of the Legislative Assembly for ten years. from Kunigal constituency



V SOMANNA (73)

PARTY:	BJP
EDUCATION:	BA
ASSETS:	RS. 60 CRORES
CRIMINAL	CASES: 1
COMMUNITY:	LINGAYAT

Somanna's candidature triggered an insider vs outsider controversy as he is from Bengaluru. However, Somanna continues to be a strong contender because of his work with popular mutts. This is a do or die battle for him, as he has reached out to Backward classes and Dalits.



Total voters: **16.51 lakh**
Male **8.14 lakh**
Female **8.36 lakh**
Others: **73**

PHASE 2

POLL PULSE

LOK SABHA ELECTION 2024

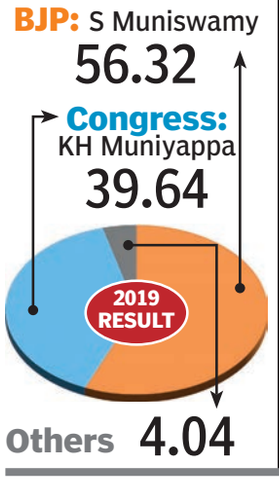
SALAR | FRIDAY | 26 APRIL 2024

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

KOLAR

KEY ISSUES

- **Poor infrastructure:** The rail coach factory between Srinivasapura and Mulbagil which is supposed to create a huge employment has gone for a toss. Kolar, despite being a district headquarters, has no proper rail link.
- **Wage settlements:** In Kolar Gold Fields, the issue of wage settlement of at least 3,000 employees, many of who have already died, still persists.



Assembly segments

Sidlaghatta, Chintamani, Srinivaspur, Mulbagal, Kolargoldfield, Bangarapet, Kolar, Malur.

Know your constituency

It has been a Cong bastion since 1952. Since 1952, 17 elections have been taken places so far. Muniyappa has represented Kolar seven times consecutively. He lost in 2019 to S Munniaswamy, BJP's newcomer.

KEY PLAYERS

M MALLESH BABU (49)

PARTY:	JD(S)
EDUCATION:	MBA
ASSETS:	RS 21.9 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	2
COMMUNITY:	SC

Babu had contested from Bangarapet constituency during 2023 Karnataka Assembly elections and lost. He is listed as a retail outlet owner under the trade name Sri Sai Service Station.

KV GOUTHAM (51)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 15 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	1
COMMUNITY:	SC

Gowtham is President of Bengaluru Central district Congress committee. He is the son of former Bengaluru Mayor KV Vijay Kumar. Speculation about his candidacy arose amid growing discontent within the Kolar unit, with five Congress legislators including minister KH Muniyappa hinting at resignation.

Total Population: **17.17 lakh**

Male **8.49 lakh**

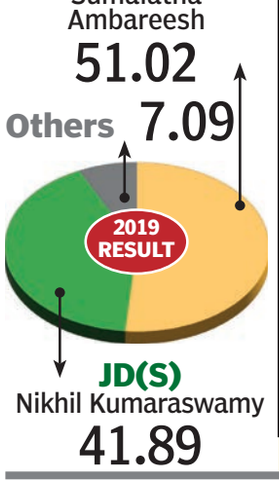
Female **8.68 lakh**

Others: **211**

MANDYA

KEY ISSUES

- **Unemployment:** The lack of jobs is driving youths to migrate to cities such as Bengaluru and Mysuru, consequently transforming villages into old-age homes.
- **Sugar factories shut:** Sugar industries such as MySugar, one of the largest factories, remain closed. The company suffers Rs 121 crore loss.
- **Farmers' woes:** The absence of agricultural processing units like cold storage facilities has inflicted losses on farmers.



Assembly segments

Malavalli, Maddur, Melukote, Mandya, Srirangapatna, Nagamangala, Krishnarajpet and Krishnarajanagara

Know your constituency

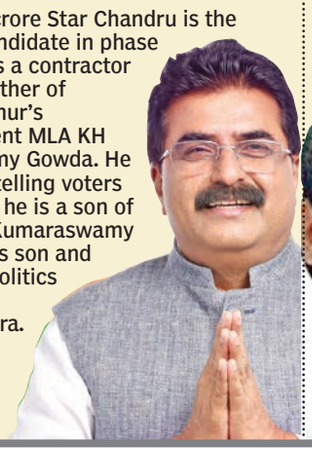
For Mandya, ruling Congress portrays it as a clash between an "outsider" and a "local", raising the stakes for JD(S) in Vokkaliga-dominated region. BJP and JD(S) fielded Ex-CM HD Kumaraswamy against Venkataramane Gowda over Mandya MP Sumalatha Ambeeresh after which she joined BJP. Despite ex-CM HD Kumaraswamy's roots in Hassan, Mandya remains a battleground for Vokkaliga politics.

KEY PLAYERS

VENKATARAMANE GOWDA (STAR CHANDRU) (59)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 622 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	VOKKALIGA

With 622 crore Star Chandru is the richest candidate in phase 2 and he is a contractor and of brother of Gauribidanur's independent MLA KH Puttaswamy Gowda. He has been telling voters that while he is a son of Mandya, Kumaraswamy is Hassan's son and does his politics in Ramanagara.



HD KUMARASWAMY (64)

PARTY:	JD(S)
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 54.65 LAKH
CRIMINAL CASES:	3
COMMUNITY:	VOKKALIGA

Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil's candidature was set aside after Independent incumbent MP Sumalatha refused to back down from contesting. After going back & forth, Sumalatha joined BJP and HDK agreed to contest. While Sumalatha backed HDK, she has not campaigned for him.

Total Population: **16.41 lakh**

Male **8.55 lakh**

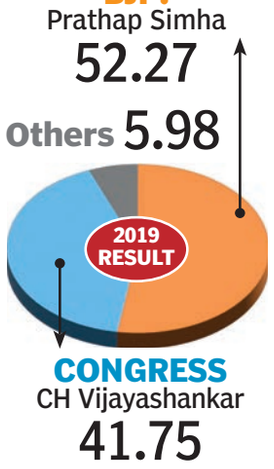
Female **8.56 lakh**

Others: **147**

MYSURU- KODAGU

KEY ISSUES

- Mysuru struggles with persistent problems such as the lack of 24x7 water supply, the region continues to face challenges with power supply, enduring frequent blackouts.
- The incomplete Mysuru airport runway expansion work has irked many
- Rural areas still lack good roads, proper drainage systems, efficient garbage collection, and electricity supply.



Assembly segments

Madikeri, Virajpet, Periyapatna, Hunasuru, Chamundeshwari, Krishnaraja, Chamaraja, Narasimharaja.

Know your constituency

Mysuru-Kodagu was once governed by the Wadiyars of Mysuru, Chikkaveera Rajendra of Kodagu, and the descendants of Tipu Sultan. Sultan's legacy was revived in public discourse after Congress government came to power. Mysuru is the home turf of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. Vokkaligas are dominant here. The population also consists of Dalits, Kurubas, Lingayats, Muslims and Kodavas.

KEY PLAYERS

YADUVEER KRISHNADATTA CHAMARAJA WADIYAR (32)

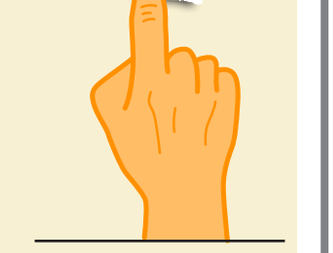
PARTY:	BJP
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 4.99 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	OBC

BJP dropped its incumbent MP Pratap Simha to nominate Yaduveer. The Wadiyar family returned to politics after two decades. Srikantadatta Narasimharaj Wadiyar had won four out of the six elections he contested from the same constituency. BJP is eying a third consecutive win here.

M LAKSHMANA (43)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 1.5 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	4
COMMUNITY:	VOKKALIGA

Lakshmana is the first Vokkaliga fielded from the constituency by Congress for over 40 years. Congress has turned this duel into a dynast versus commoner debate.



Total voters: **20.7 lakh**

Male **10.1 lakh**

Female **10.5 lakh**

Others: **182**

Most candidates

BENGALURU SOUTH (32)

Youngest candidate

SUMAN HN (25) - KOLAR

Least candidates

DAKSHINA KANNADA (9)

Oldest candidate

VATAL NAGARAJ (75) - B'LURU SOUTH

Total voters in Karnataka: **5.42 crore**

Male:	Female:	Others:
2.71 crore	2.07 cr	4,933 cr

CHAMARAJANAGAR

Assembly segments

Kollegal, Chamarajanagar, Gundlupet, Hanur, HD Kote, Nanjangud, Varuna and T Narasipur.

Know your constituency

This constituency is reserved for SCs and came into existence in 1962. The district is the third largest in the State in terms of population. There has been 17 elections so far, out of which Congress has won 10 times. However, BJP bagged it for first time in 2019. Dalits and Lingayats are in sizeable numbers here, followed by backward classes, minorities and tribals. CM Siddaramaiah's Assembly segment Varuna is in this constituency.

Total voters: **17.68 lakh**

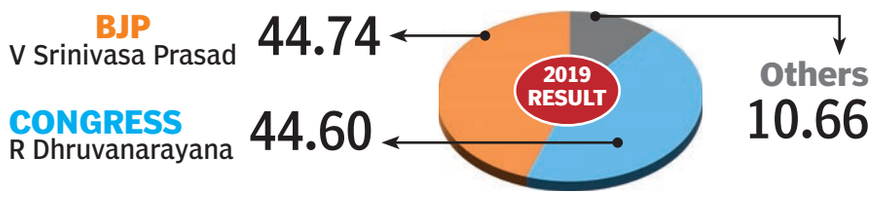
Male **8.74 lakh**

Female **8.94 lakh**

Others: **104**

KEY ISSUES

- **Drought and water scarcity:** The area depends heavily on rain and lack of it has caused severe drought. Villages under Hanur and Raghavapur, and forest fringe villages of Gundlupet face grave drinking water problems. Authorities are blamed for not refilling lakes and rejuvenating water sources.
- **Infrastructure challenges in remote areas:** The hilly terrain, dense forests, and poor mobile network coverage in some villages make it difficult to deliver essential services and conduct official business
- **Human-animal conflicts:** The seat has witnessed at least eight leopard attacks recently and Forset Department said the incidents were much higher last year.

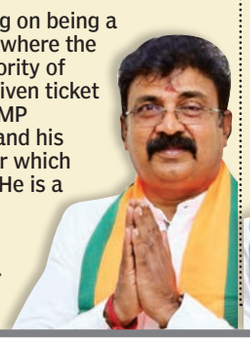


KEY PLAYERS

BALARAJ S (58)

PARTY:	BJP
EDUCATION:	GRADUATE
ASSETS:	RS 2CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	SC

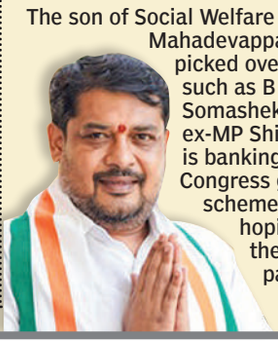
Balaraj is banking on being a dalit in Kollegal, where the caste forms majority of voters. He was given ticket over incumbent MP Srinivas Prasad and his son-in-laws, after which Prasad quit BJP. He is a BS Yediyurappa supporter, a Lingayat, & is hoping to garner their votes too.



SUNIL BOSE (42)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	12TH PASS
ASSETS:	RS 7.8CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	1
COMMUNITY:	SC

The son of Social Welfare Minister HC Mahadevappa was picked over biggies such as B Somashekar and ex-MP Shivanna. Bose is banking on Congress guarantee schemes and hoping to end the saffron party's term



CHITRADURGA

Assembly segments

Molakalmur, Chitradurga, Hiriyur, Hosadurga, Holalkere, Challakere, Pavagada and Sira.

Know your constituency

SCs and STs form half the electorate. SC (left), Muslims, Veerashiava-Lingayats, Vokkaligas, Gollas, Nayakas and Lambanis are in large numbers. Chitradurga was initially considered a Congress' stronghold. The party won 11 times. BJP won only 2 elections so far.

Total voters: **18.49 lakh**

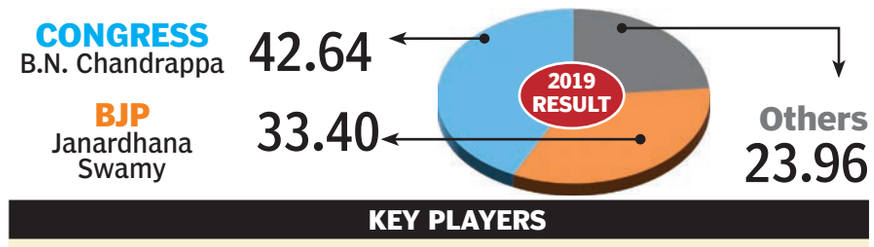
Male **9.21 lakh**

Female **9.27 lakh**

Others: **104**

KEY ISSUES

- **Lack of connectivity**: Tumakuru-Davangee railway link via Chitradurga and Upper Bhadra project are the long pending demands of residents
- **Grappling with water crisis**: All the six taluks in the districts have been declared drought affected. According to district administration at least 120 villages going to face massive drinking water shortage in coming days.
- **Poor healthcare**: PHCs' shortage has deprived people from basic healthcare.

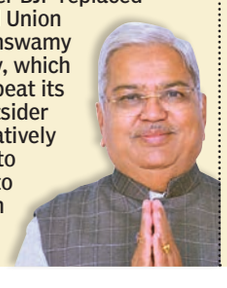


KEY PLAYERS

GOVIND MAKTHAPPA KARJOL (73)

PARTY:	BJP
EDUCATION:	10TH PASS
ASSETS:	RS 4.4 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	DALIT

A Dalit leader and former deputy chief minister of the State, Govind Karjol was given seat after BJP replaced incumbent MP and Union Minister A Narayanswamy in the constituency, which is known not to repeat its MP. Having the outsider tag, Karjol was relatively unknown and had to introduce himself to voters especially in remote villages.



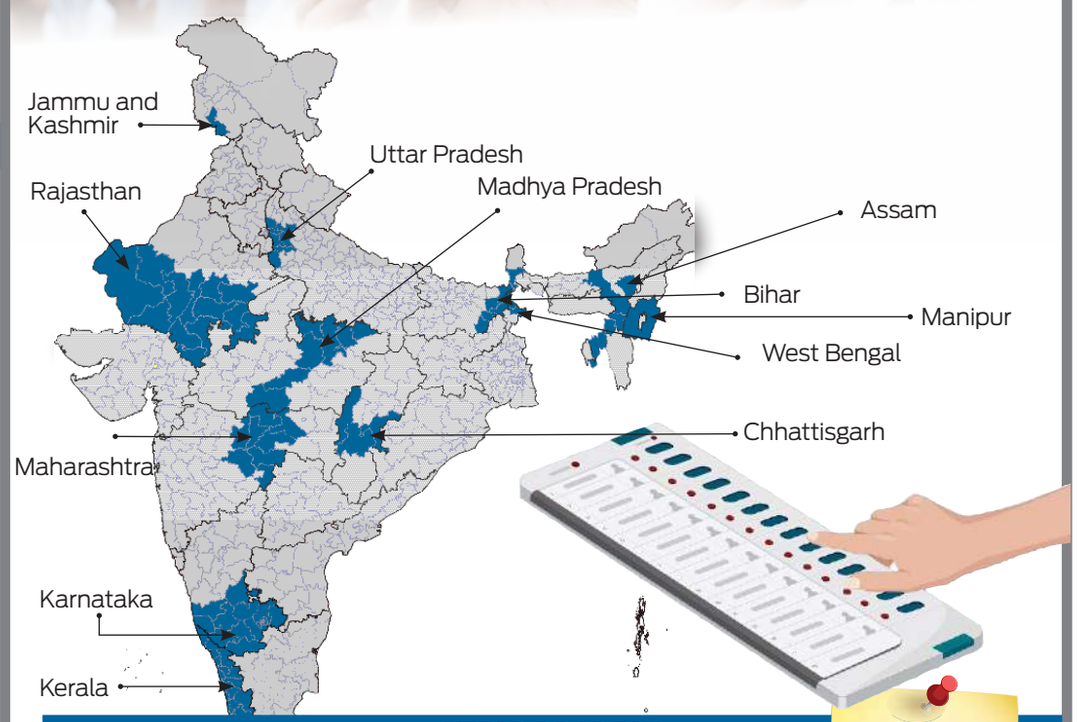
BN CHANDRAPPA (68)

PARTY:	CONGRESS
EDUCATION:	MA
ASSETS:	RS 4.83 CR
CRIMINAL CASES:	NIL
COMMUNITY:	DALIT

Hailing from Chikkamagaluru, Chandrappa faced Opposition from some Congress workers who sought a local candidate here. Despite his defeat in 2019, he remained connected with voters. The reputation of being a gentleman is an advantage to his campaign.

89 seats go to polls in 2nd show

Voters will beat the heat in Kerala, UP, WB, violence-hit Manipur and 8 other states



ASSAM

NO OF CANDIDATES: 61

Total Phases: 3 | Phase 2 seats: 5

Constituencies: Darrang-Udalguri, Diphu, Karimganj, Silchar, Nagaon

KEY CANDIDATES

PARIMAL SUKLABAIDYA, BJP
Seat: Silchar

The Assam Excise Minister will take on Congress district General Secretary Surjya Kanta Sarkar. The contest is triangular between him, Sarkar & TMC's Radheyshyam Biswa. Bengali Hindus and Muslims are a majority here.

JOHN BARNARD SANGMA, Gana Suraksha Party
Seat: Diphu

75-year-old John Barnard Sangma is a retired officer of Indian Revenue Service who has been fielded by Gana Suraksha Party

BIHAR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 50

Total Phases: 7 | Phase 2 seats: 5

Constituencies: Kishanganj, Katihar, Purnia, Bhagalpur, Banka

KEY CANDIDATES

MOHAMMED JAWED, Congress
Seat: Kishanganj

Mohammad Jawed was elected to the Lok Sabha from Kishanganj constituency in Bihar from Congress. He has been nominated as the Congress candidate from the same constituency for the 2024 polls.

PAPPU YADAV, Independent
Seat: Purnia

He is fighting from Purnia as an independent candidate, promoting a three-way contest between him, JD(U) and RJD. He joined Congress but is contesting independently due to the denial of a ticket. The entry of the 5-time MP has made it a tough fight for RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, who is eyeing to win the seat for the first time.

CHHATTISGARH

NO OF CANDIDATES: 41

Total Phases: 3 | Phase 2 seats: 3

Constituencies: Rajnandgaon, Mahasamund, Kanker

KEY CANDIDATES

BHUPESH BAGHEL, Congress
Seat: Rajnandgaon

This seat is BJP bastion for the past 30 years and is 3-time ex-CM Raman Singh's turf. Ex-CM Baghel is locked in a contest with BJP's sitting MP Santosh Pandey. BJP hasn't lost this seat since 2009. Congress has put 1 of its strong OBC candidates in an attempt to break the convention and win.

BHOJRAJ NAG, BJP
Seat: Kanker

He is a priest, grassroots activist and former MLA, who has worked his way up the party ranks. Known for his controversial statements, he has been the party's face in Bastar in its campaign against alleged conversions of tribals.

JAMMU AND KASHMIR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 22

Total Phases: 5 | Phase 2 seats: 1

Seat: Jammu

KEY CANDIDATES

RAMAN BHALLA, Congress
Seat: Jammu

A long-time loyalist of senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, Bhalla was appointed as the working president of J&K Congress in 2021. Jobs for youths is his major poll plank. He is targeting incumbent BJP MP over poor infra.

JUGAL KISHORE SHARMA, BJP
Seat: Jammu

Sharma has won the seat twice — in 2014 and 2019. The constituency has a Hindu-majority belt in Samba, Reasi and Jammu. There were anti-government protests by youths here over recruitment exam scams in the past 3 years, which dented BJP's image.

UTTAR PRADESH

NO OF CANDIDATES: 91

Phases: 7
Phase 2 seats: 8

Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, Gautam Buddha Nagar, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Mathura

KEY CANDIDATES

HEMA MALINI, BJP
Seat: Mathura

The actor-turned-politician faces a challenge from OBC leader Mukesh Dhangar of the Congress, representing INDIA bloc. The 2-time MP is advocating the setting up of a Film City in the temple town.

DANISH ALI, Congress
Seat: Amroha

The sitting MP was expelled by BJP for 'anti-party acts', after which he joined Cong. BJP faces anger over joblessness and exam paper leaks. It is among 17 seats that Cong is in alliance with SP.

WEST BENGAL

NO OF CANDIDATES: 47

Phases: 7
Phase 2 seats: 3

Darjeeling, Raiganj, Balurghat

KEY CANDIDATES

SUKANTA MAJUMDAR, BJP
Seat: Balurghat

Majumdar, who has a longstanding association with RSS, became the first-time parliamentarian from Balurghat after defeating TMC MP Arpita Ghosh in 2019. He is the 10th state president of BJP, West Bengal.

BISHNU PRASAD SHARMA, IND
Seat: Darjeeling

Bishnu Prasad Sharma from BJP is fighting as Independent after the party ignored his demand for to field a local candidate. Darjeeling has been demanding for separate state of Gorkhaland. The tea industry here is facing a crisis.

MANIPUR

NO OF CANDIDATES: 4

Phases: 2 | Phase 2 seats: 14

Seat: Outer Manipur

KEY CANDIDATES

ALFRED KAN-NGAM ARTHUR, Congress
Seat: Outer Manipur

Alfred Kan-Ngam Arthur is a musician and journal-ist-turned-MLA. He is contest-ing against Kachui Timothy Zimik of Naga People's Front and 2 other independents. He reportedly contributed to improving government-run educational institutions.

KACHUI TIMOTHY ZIMIK, NPF; Seat: Outer Manipur
A retired IRS officer, Zimik is Naga People's Front (NPF) candidate. Zimik is a retired principal chief commissioner of Income Tax under Ministry of Finance (Revenue). He was a research scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

TRIPURA

NO OF CANDIDATES: 9

Phases: 2 | Phase 2 seats: 1

Seat: Tripura East

KEY PLAYERS

RAJENDRA REANG, CPI (M)
Seat: Tripura East

Rajendra Reang is the former executive member of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. He is the member of Communist Party of India and the former President of Tribal Youth Federation.

KRITI DEBBARMAN, BJP
Seat: Tripura East

This is the debut polls for Debbarman, also known as the 'princess' of Manikya royal family. She is the sister of Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma, the founder of Tipra Motha Party.

KERALA

NO OF CANDIDATES: 194

Phases: 1 | Phase 2 seats: 20

Constituencies: Kasaragod, Kannur, Vadakara, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Ponnani, Palakkad, Alathur, Thrissur, Chalakudy, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha, Mavelikkara, Pathanamthitta, Kollam, Attingal, Thiruvananthapuram

KEY CANDIDATES

RAHUL GANDHI, Congress
Seat: Wayanad

He will face CPI(M)'s Annie Raja, who is also a part of INDIA bloc. He previously represented Amethi and is seen as Cong's PM candidate. Gandhi led a Kashmir to Kanyakumari Bharat Jodo Yatra to fight BJP's 'divisive politics'.

RAJEEV CHANDRASHEKHAR, BJP
Seat: Thiruvananthapuram

Rajeev Chandrasekhar is making his Lok Sabha debut and wants to open the saffron party's account in Kerala. He is up against Shashi Tharoor, who is seeking a re-election for a fourth consecutive term.

MADHYA PRADESH

NO OF CANDIDATES: 88

Phases: 4 | Phase 2 seats: 6

Constituencies: Tikamgarh, Damoh, Khajuraho, Satna, Rewa and Hoshangabad

KEY PLAYERS

NEELAM MISHRA, Congress
Seat: Rewa

Congress candidate from Rewa, Neelam Mishra once served as a Member of Legislative Assembly from Semariya on the BJP's ticket. She held the MLA position from 2013 to 2018. Along with her husband, Abhay Mishra -- the only Congress MLA from the 8 assembly seats of Rewa -- they left the BJP and joined Congress in 2018.

VIRENDRA KHATIK, BJP
Seat: Tikamgarh

Khatik is eyeing a fourth win from Tikamgarh. He has not lost the seat since it was formed in 2009. Cong has fielded a new face, Pankaj Ahirwar, from the constituency. In 2019, Khatik defeated Congress' Kiran Ahirwar by a margin of over 3.48 lakh votes.

MAHARASHTRA

NO OF CANDIDATES: 204

Phases: 5 | Phase 2 seats: 8

Constituencies: Buldhana, Akola, Amravati, Wardha, Yavatmal-Washim, Hingoli, Nanded, Parbhani

KEY CANDIDATES

PRASHANT YASHWANT AMBEDKAR, VBA
Seat: Akola

Prakash Yashwant Ambedkar is writer, lawyer and the grandson of Baba Saheb Ambedkar. He is the president of Vanchit Bahujan Aaghadi party. He is a three-time MP.

VASANTRAO BALWANTRAO CHAVAN, Congress
Seat: Nanded

Chavan is an Independent Member of Legislative Assembly from Naigaon, Chavan joined Congress in 2014. He was appointed to Legislative Assembly's Public Accounts Committee.

RAJASTHAN

NO OF CANDIDATES: 152

Phases: 2 | Phase 2 seats: 13

Constituencies: Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Pali, Jodhpur, Barmer, Jalore, Udaipur, Banswara, Chittorgarh, Rajsamand, Bhilwara, Kota, Jhalawar-Baran

KEY PLAYERS

OM BIRLA, BJP
Seat: Kota

Om Birla is the current Speaker of the Lok Sabha since 2019. He is the Member of Parliament from Kota-Bundi constituency in Rajasthan since 2014.

RAJKUMAR ROAT, BAP
Seat: Banswara

Cong is supporting Roat in this tribal-majority seat days after its candidate entered the fray. Cong's decision comes after its veteran tribal leader Malviya joined BJP in Feb & was given a ticket.

Cong, BJP lock horns again within a year

2.88 crore voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in 30,602 polling stations

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

Congress and BJP will lock horns on the electoral battleground again, in less than a year, in Karnataka as the stage is set for voting in the first phase in 14 Lok Sabha seats on Friday.

It's going to be a straight fight between ruling Congress and BJP-JD(S) combine unlike Assembly elections in May last year which witnessed a triangular contest among the three parties. The State has a total of 28 Lok Sabha constituencies. The second phase of polling in the remaining 14 seats is on 7 May. A total of 247 candidates — 226 men and 21 women — are in the fray for the first phase in most of the southern and coastal districts.

More than 2.88 crore voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in 30,602 polling stations where polling will take place between 7am to 6pm. While Congress is contesting in all 14 seats, BJP has fielded nominees in 11 and its alliance partner JD(S), which joined National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in three — Hassan, Mandya and Kolar.

Polling Booth officers arrive from mustering centres with EVMs to go to their various polling booth centres ahead of Lok Sabha elections at Kamala Bai School in Bengaluru on Thursday
PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD

Besides the three, the segments where elections will be held on Friday are: Udupi-Chikkamagaluru, Dakshina Kannada, Chitradurga, Tumakuru, Mysuru, Chamarajanagar, Bengaluru Rural, Bengaluru North, Bengaluru Central, Bengaluru South and Chikkaballapur.

In the 2019, Congress and JD(S), which were in alliance and ruling the State then, had secured just one seat each in these 14 segments. BJP had won in 11 and ensured the victory of a party-supported independent candidate in Mandya.

Having scored a thumping victory in the Assembly elections, Congress now appears determined to put up a strong show. Karnataka is the most important state for the BJP in south India as it's only here that it had held power in the past. "Its alliance partner JD(S) is fighting to remain politically relevant, after the Assembly poll drubbing,"

According to Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Meena, 1.4 lakh polling officials will be on duty for the first phase. Besides them, 5,000 micro-observers, 50,000 civil police personnel, 65 companies of Central Parliamentary Force and State Armed Police force of other States will also be deployed for security.

All the 2,829 polling stations of Bengaluru Rural will be webcast, Meena said. "This is as per the request of our returning officers and observers; so we have given more than double the Central parliamentary force for Bengaluru Rural. Seven companies of Central paramilitary forces have been inducted at the constituency since 22 April," he said on Wednesday.

In fact, out of the total 30,602 polling stations in the first phase, 19,701 will be webcast, and 1,370 covered via CCTVs, he said. *—PTI*

City has theme-based polling booths

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

Bengaluru will feature six theme-based polling booths to engage voters during elections on Friday. Bengaluru Central alone has six themed booths. They are 'Save Water and Save Life' in Shivajinagar, 'Save Forest' in Shantinagar, 'Ayurveda' in Gandhinagar, 'Cultural' in Rajajinagar, 'Yakshagana' in Chamrajpet and 'Bengaluru Karaga' in Chickpet. EC has displayed 'Nothing Like voting, Vote for sure' and 'Take your first step to change the world' as messages at polling booth. *—Salar News*

2 elderly women die amid home voting

KOPPAL, 25 APRIL

In two separate incidents, two elderly women lost their lives either before or shortly after exercising their democratic rights from their homes for Lok Sabha elections. In Halageri village of Koppal taluk, 95-year-old Parvathamma Sajjan, who had registered for home voting, died just before the election staff arrived at her residence. The woman succumbed to her age-related ailments. Similarly, in Brahmawara taluk of Udupi district, P Yashodha Narayana Upadhyay, an 83-year-old resident of Sastana Pandeshwar Chadagara Agrahara, died after casting her vote at home on Tuesday. Before voting, Upadhyay had complained of chest pain. *—Salar News*

Modi to begin 2-day campaign in State from Sunday

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to make a whirlwind tour of Karnataka on 28 and 29 April, where he will address public meetings in five districts and canvas for BJP for Lok Sabha elections, the party's State unit said on Thursday.

Modi will reach Belagavi on Sunday morning and address a public meeting at 10am, according to BJP election management committee State coordinator V Sunil Kumar. He would then fly to Sirsi to attend a public meeting at 12 noon. The PM's next destination would be Davangere, where he is expected to take part in an election rally at 2pm. Later, Modi would address a public meeting in Ballari at 4pm. On Monday, the Prime Minister would travel to Bagalkot to attend a public meeting at 11 am. *—PTI*

Law institute files 28 complaints with EC

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

Bengaluru-based Law and Policy Research Institute (LAPRI) has filed 28 complaints with Election Commission and Chief Electoral Officers across different states, highlighting violations of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) and Representation of the People Act (RPA).

According to a press release from LAPRI, it has raised serious concerns regarding the Election Commission of India's (ECI) failure to uphold the sanctity of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. *—Salar News*

3 killed as train runs over them in Byappanahalli

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

Three people were killed when they were run over by a train near Byappanahalli railway station, police said on Thursday. According to the police, the three people who were on the track got run over by the Kannur Express, resulting in their instantaneous death. Two of them have been identified as Shashi Kumar and Lokesh from Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, but the identity of the third victim could not be ascertained immediately, police said. Lokesh was a cab driver and Kumar had recently come to the City in search of a livelihood. *—PTI*

Muslim quota: NCBC to summon Chief Secy

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

- While Karnataka provides 32 per cent reservation to backward classes in local body elections, including Muslims, NCBC stressed the need for a nuanced approach

National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) would be summoning Karnataka Chief Secretary over "blanket reservation" given to Muslim community in the State, chairperson Hansraj Ahir said on Thursday.

NCBC has criticised the Karnataka government's decision to categorise the entire Muslim community as a backward caste for reservation purposes saying such blanket categorisation undermines the principles of social justice. "All castes/communities of Muslim religion in Karnataka are considered socially and educationally backward classes of citizens and are categorised as Muslim Caste separately under Category IIB in the State List of Backward Classes," NCBC chairperson Ahir said.

"This classification enables them to receive reservation in educational institution admissions and appointments to posts and vacancies in the services of the State, as per Articles 15(4) and 16(4) of the Constitution of India," he said.

NCBC has emphasised that while there are indeed underprivileged and historically marginalised sections within the Muslim community, treating the entire religion as backward overlooks the diversity and complexities within Muslim society.

Ahir said the response received from the State government on the matter has not been satisfactory.

According to the data submitted by Karnataka Backward Classes Welfare Department, all castes and communities within the Muslim religion have been enlisted as socially and educationally backward classes under Category IIB in the State List of Backward Classes.

While Karnataka provides 32 per cent reservation to backward classes in local body elections, including Muslims, NCBC stressed the need for a nuanced approach that accounts for the diversity within these communities. According to the 2011 Census, Muslims constitute 12.92 per cent of the population in Karnataka. *—PTI*

Orange alert: KSNDMC cell issues animated advisory

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC) has issued a series of animated shorts in Kannada advising people of appropriate measures to take during extreme temperatures to keep themselves safe.

"Karnataka has not seen such extreme temperatures and heat waves in the recent past. So, we wanted to ensure a wider reach for safety measures, therefore we decided to issue them in a reader-friendly format," said an official from KSNDMC.

Meteorological Centre Bengaluru, Indian Meteorological Department, had issued a five-day heat wave warning, lasting till April orange alert, for parts of Karnataka. "In places like Bagalkot, Vijayapura, Kalaburagi, Yadgir, Raichur, Koppal, Ballari, Tumkur, Mandya, Gadag, Davangere and Chitradurga, the temperature is likely to touch 40 degrees Celsius on Friday," said CP Patil, director of the centre.

The orange alert would mean an increased likelihood of heat illness symptoms in people who are exposed to the sun for a prolonged period as well as those who do manual work.

People are also advised not to leave their children or pets inside parked vehicles. The temperatures of Bengaluru are likely to be around 37 degrees Celsius and 23 degrees Celsius respectively for the next 48 hours, said Patil.

PHOTO: PTI

Hassan recorded the highest jump from its normal minimum temperature. It recorded 22.6 degrees Celsius, about 2.8 degrees more than usual.

According to IMD, on 29 April light rain is also likely in isolated places over Bidar, Kalaburagi, Yadgir, Vijayapura, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Kodagu, Mysuru, Mandya and Chitradurga districts. On 30 April, light rain is predicted again for Bidar, Kalaburgi, Yadgir, Vijayapura, Raichur, Koppal, Ballari, Chikkamagaluru, Tumkur, Chikkaballapur, Bengaluru Rural, Bengaluru Urban and Kodagu districts. *—PTI*

HUBBALLI MURDER

'Prosecutor told to give severe punishment'

BIDAR, 25 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said he has asked public prosecutor and police to try to ensure that the accused in the Hubballi murder of student Neha Hiremath gets severe punishment.

He accused the Opposition BJP -- which has demanded a CBI probe -- of trying to politicise the case. "I have already condemned the murder and I condemn it once again. The case has already been given to CID (Crime Investigation Department) to investigate. We are setting up a special court and stringent punishment should be ensured for accused," Siddaramaiah said.

Neha Hiremath (23), daughter of Congress Councillor of Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation Niranjan Hiremath, was stabbed to death on the campus of BVB College last Thursday. The accused Fayaz Khondunaik, was arrested by police.

Meanwhile, Niranjan Hiremath, father of student Neha, said on Thursday that his family faces a threat from some unknown people who allegedly filmed the post-funeral rituals in their house.

"On the fifth day of the incident when we were busy with rituals, a person came to our house, and made videos of our house and family members," Hiremath said, demanding security for his family.

He added that when he asked the person filming his rooms who he was, the stranger did not give any satisfactory reply "I got to know from a Swami that the stranger too had been hanging around for the past many days before the incident," Hiremath said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

YAKSHAGANA ARTIST DIES AT 67

KUNDAPUR, 25 APRIL

Yakshagana thespian Subrahmanya Dhareshwar (67), who had earned the fame of 'Bhagavata Shrestha' for his scintillating voice, passed away on Thursday in Bengaluru.

Family sources said the end came at his son's house in Bengaluru in the morning following a brief illness. He is survived by his wife, son and a daughter. He was revered for filling the vacuum that arose after the departure of Kalinga Navada, who had created a new wave in Yakshagana in Badguthittu version.

Dhareshwar had served 46 years in Yakshagana, a unique dance form from coastal Karnataka which involves distinct singing, dancing and drama styles, that has a resemblance with Theyyam.

Born in Gokarna in Uttara Kannada district in 1957, he used to practice music and perform. *—PTI*

City doctor gets 5-year jail for 'harassing' woman in Saudi Arabia

DANIEL GEORGE
BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

A doctor from Bengaluru employed in Saudi Arabia has been sentenced to five years imprisonment and has been imposed a fine of 1.5 lakh Riyals (around Rs 33.4 lakh), by a Saudi Arabian court for allegedly harassing a woman.

The doctor was working as a pathologist in Jizan province in Saudi Arabia and was convicted for harassing a young Saudi national woman who was doing her internship under him, diplomatic sources at Indian Consulate in Jeddah told **Salar News**. The woman lodged a complaint after which public prosecution referred the case to criminal court which awarded him the sentence.

- Doctor was working as a pathologist in Jizan province in Saudi Arabia and was convicted for harassing a woman who was doing her internship under him

A native of Devagiri in Haveri district, the doctor was showing a sample on a microscope when he accidentally touched the woman's hand, the sources said.

The doctor's family has approached Indian diplomatic mission and said it was a case of misunderstanding. *—Salar News*

DKS: IT sleuths threatening leaders who were raided

BENGALURU, 25 APRIL

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday alleged that Income Tax department officials were conducting raids targeting Congress, ahead of Lok Sabha polls, and are threatening leaders who faced raids to claim that money belongs to him and the party.

The State Congress president also claimed that the department is working like "BJP agents".

IT sleuths on Wednesday conducted simultaneous raids at some locations in and around Bengaluru, belonging to businessmen and associates of prominent political leaders ahead of the Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka.

He said, "They (IT sleuths) have to do searches for an hour or so and go back; instead, people are being forced to sit with them for an entire day, not allowing them to be involved in election activities. I did not expect such politics from the Income Tax." *—PTI*

CAMPAIGN IN STYLE

Congress MLA NA Haris cycles in Neelasandra to campaign for Bengaluru Central candidate Mansoor Ali Khan, on Thursday ***PHOTO: SALAR***

TO WOO VOTERS

Mysuru rolls out Sakthi, disabled-friendly booths

MYSURU, 25 APRIL

Election Commission and district authorities have rolled out a host of innovative polling booths for Lok Sabha elections on Friday in a bid to enhance the voting experience. As many as 55 Sakthi booths, 11 specially designed booths for the specially-abled, 11 youth-focused booths, 12 traditional booths and 10 model booths were launched across Mysuru.

For constituencies with a high number of female voters, five Sakthi booths have been established in each Assembly constituency. Similarly, one polling booth is dedicated to

constituencies with a high number of specially-abled voters, while another is set up for young voters. Led by District Sweep Committee, authorities have installed facilities such as ramps, wheelchairs and assistants at polling stations. For visually impaired voters, Braille ballot papers and audio explanations will be provided. *—Salar News*

Mysuru hotels offer freebies to boost voters turnout

MYSURU, 25 APRIL

Some restaurant owners in Mysuru are offering free breakfasts and discounts on meals to encourage citizens to cast their votes.

Dakshina Paaka Hotel in Nazarbad is offering 'chow chow bath' for free to voters arriving between 7am and 4pm and Hotel Hanumantu in Nazarbad is offering a 10% discount on meals.

Puneri Shreeman tea shop on Narayana Shastri Road is giving 20 per cent discount to customers who show their voter mark, said Shashikant Puneri, the shop owner.

Tourists visiting the sand

museum by sand sculptor artist MN Gauri at the foothills of Chamundi Hill can get a 30% discount on ticket prices if they have voted.

Narayana Gowda, President of Mysuru District Hotel Owners' Association, said restaurants are offering free food and discounts ranging from 10% to 20% to increase voter turnout. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Odisha: 2 Maoists killed in gun battle with cops

BHUBANESWAR, 25 APRIL

At least two Maoists were killed early on Thursday in a gun battle between red rebels and security forces in Odisha's Boudh district, police said.The exchange of fire between Maoists and personnel of Odisha's elite Special Operation Group (SOG) took place in Parhel reserve forest under Kantamal Police Station limits, a senior officer said. "Two bodies of Maoists along with arms, grenades and other articles were recovered from the operation site," he said. The operation was going on till Thursday morning.—*PTI*

SC to share info on filing cases thro' WhatsApp: CJI

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

The Supreme Court will start sharing information relating to cause lists, and filing and listing of cases to advocates through WhatsApp messages, Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud announced on Thursday. The announcement was made by the CJI before a nine-judge bench headed by him commenced the hearing on a vexed legal question arising from the petitions whether private properties can be considered "material resources of the community" under Article 39(b) of the Constitution, which is a part of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). "In the 75th year, the Supreme Court launches an initiative to strengthen access to justice by integration of WhatsApp messages with the IT services of the Supreme Court," the CJI said. Now, the advocates will receive automated messages about filing the cases, he said, adding that the members of the bar will also get the cause lists, as and when they are published, on mobile phones. A cause list features the cases to be heard by a court on a given day. —*PTI*

1 killed, 4 injured in clash between 2 groups in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 25 APRIL

An 80-year-old woman was killed and four persons were injured after two groups clashed in Gujarat's Ahmedabad city over the publication of names in a pamphlet for a local temple festival, the police said Thursday. Leeraben Bharwad lost her life after she was hit by a stone in the chest when two groups belonging to one community targeted each other with sticks and stones in the city's Vastrapur area on Wednesday night, an official said. One group wanted a few names to be included in the pamphlet for a local temple festival. The official said a disagreement over it devolved into a clash between two groups. Four people were also injured in the incident, he said. First Information Report (FIRs) have been registered against 21 identified and unidentified people from both sides and efforts are on to nab them, Vastrapur police inspector LL Chavda said. —*PTI*

Remotely piloted IAF aircraft crashes in Jaisalmer

JAISALMER, 25 APRIL

A remotely piloted aircraft of the Indian Air Force crashed in Pithala village in Jaisalmer district, the IAF said on Thursday. No damage to any personnel or property has been reported, the IAF said. "One Remotely Piloted Aircraft of the Indian Air Force met with an accident near Jaisalmer today during a routine training sortie,' IAF said in a post on X. "No damage to any personnel or property has been reported. A Court of Inquiry has been constituted to find out the cause of the accident," the IAF said.—*PTI*

Bengal school jobs verdict is gross injustice: Mamata

High Court has been 'sold out', says Banerjee after HC verdict

KESHIARY, 25 APRIL

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had allegedly said that High Court has been "sold out." The remarks were reportedly made in the wake of the High Court's decision to quash the appointment of around 24,000 teachers in its verdict in the school jobs for cash case.

Banerjee on Thursday dubbed the cancellation of over 25,000 school jobs as "gross injustice" and alleged that it was a ploy by the BJP to stop these job losers from being deployed in poll duty.

Banerjee, while addressing an election rally in the

> It is a ploy by BJP. I have respect for the judiciary but what has happened is gross injustice
>
> -Mamata Banerjee, Bengal Chief Minister

Medinipur Lok Sabha constituency in Paschim Medinipur district, wondered how the schools could function with so many teachers out of jobs.

Earlier this week, the Calcutta High Court had declared the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools as "null and void," ordering the cancellation of all appointments made through it.

"If someone has committed a mistake, it can be rectified, but snatching 25,000 jobs is a gross injustice. How will the schools function, if so many teachers are out of jobs?

"It is a ploy by the BJP. I have respect for the judiciary but what has happened is gross injustice," Banerjee said.

"So many jobs have been taken away so that these job losers cannot be deployed in poll duty during elections and central government employees can be engaged, who will work at the behest of the saffron camp," she added.

Senior Advocate and Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI (M) leader Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya today urged the Bench of Chief Justice TS Sivagnanam and Justice Hiranmay Bhattacharya to strict action against the Chief Minister for her "contemptuous" statements. —*Bar and Bench/ PTI*

Jai Dehadrai offers peace, withdraws case against Mahua

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Lawyer Jai Anant Dehadrai on Thursday withdrew from the Delhi High Court his defamation lawsuit against former partner TMC leader Mahua Moitra as a "peace offering".

Dehadrai had last year accused Moitra of taking bribes from businessman and Hiranandani Group CEO Darshan Hiranandani to ask questions in Parliament, which led to her expulsion from the Lok Sabha on8 December.

Earlier this year, Dehadrai also moved the present lawsuit seeking damages of Rs 2 crore from the former lawmaker claiming that after he filed a complaint with the CBI over Moitra receiving illegal gratification for unauthorisedly providing her Lok Sabha login credentials to a third party, she "embarked on a ceaseless campaign of slander and abuse" to disseminate "false, abusive, and defamatory statements '' against him.

Mahua Moitra
PHOTO: X@BARANDBENCH

On Thursday, Dahadrai's counsel suggested that the present case could be put to an end if Moitra was willing to "de-escalate" by undertaking that she would not make "palpably false" statements.

Maintaining that judicial time is "best not spent" on such disputes that can be resolved between the parties, Justice Prateek Jalan said, "If this is something that can stop the crossfire, it is a welcome suggestion."

Dehadrai, who was present in court, subsequently said he would unconditionally withdraw the lawsuit. —*PTI*

NATURE'S REVENGE

The washed away part of the National Highway 313 between Hunli and Anini following a landslide, in Dibang Valley district, Arunachal Pradesh, on Thursday
Photo: PTI

PHOTO: PTI

RAPID RESPONSE TEAM FORMED IN RANCHI AMID FLU

RANCHI, 25 APRIL

The Animal Husbandry Directorate, Ranchi, has formed a Rapid Response Team (RRT) for the culling of poultry and cleaning and disinfection of infected areas after H5N1 Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) was detected in the poultry area, Hotwa.

Assistant Manager Regional Poultry Farm, Dr Ganesh Ram Mahali, said, "We have been asked to dispose of all the birds and eggs in the poultry farm, and also in the 1km radius. We have formed a team for the task. Since the bird flu has been confirmed, we have to create awareness among people not to eat chicken, since it will increase the risk of infection. 1697 eggs and 1800 birds have been disposed of so far. The whole farm is being sanitised and we will not bring any birds for the next three months. We collected the sample and sent it to Kolkata, which they confirmed on 20 April, after which the confirmation was sent to the Jharkhand government and also to the Central Government."

On the orders of the District Collector, about 1745 chickens, 450 ducks and 1697 eggs living here have been disposed of.

During this time, the doctor and other employees of the poultry farm have been ordered to spread awareness in the surrounding area.

—*ANI*

ANTI-CHINA PROTEST

Tibetan govt in-exile holds talk with China

DHARAMSHALA, 25 APRIL

The Tibetan government-in-exile and China are holding back-channel talks, signalling signs of willingness by both sides to re-engage over a decade after the formal dialogue process hit a dead end in view of anti-China protests in Tibet and Beijing's hardline approach towards the Buddhist region.

The Sikyong or political head of Tibet's government-in-exile, Penpa Tsering, confirming the informal talks, said his interlocutor has been dealing with "people in Beijing" but there is no immediate expectation of a forward movement.

"We have had back-channel (engagement) since last year. But we have no immediate expectations from it. It has to be a long-term (one)," Tsering told a small group of journalists, insisting that the talks are "very informal".

"I have my interlocutor who deals with people in Beijing. Then there are other elements also trying to reach out to us," the head of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) said.

From 2002 to 2010, Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama's representatives and Chinese government held nine rounds of dialogue that did not produce any concrete outcome.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

- Political head of Tibet's government-in-exile, Penpa Tsering said his interlocutor has been dealing with "people in Beijing" but there is no immediate expectation of a forward movement

Another senior Tibetan leader indicated that the back-channel talks are aimed at reviving overall dialogue process as it is the only way out to resolve Tibetan issue.

The CTA leader, referring to the frosty ties between New Delhi and Beijing following the eastern Ladakh row in 2020, said the Chinese belligerence along the Indian border highlighted the Tibetan issue in India.

"With the Chinese belligerence on the border, the Tibetan issue also naturally gets highlighted in India," he said.

—*PTI*

CBI files first FIR in Sandeshkhali case

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

The CBI has registered the first case in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali related to the land grab and sexual assault allegations against five influential people there, officials said on Thursday.

The case pertains to a land dispute where women of the victim's family had to allegedly face sexual assault from influential people in the area, they said.

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has not yet disclosed the identity of the five accused and the victims.

Calcutta High Court on 10 April had ordered a court-monitored CBI investigation into allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, saying an "impartial inquiry" was required in the interest of justice and fair play.

CBI had circulated an email ID for people to make complaints in such cases in which a large number of complaints were received.

PHOTO: PTI

The agency had dispatched a team to Sandeshkhali to ascertain allegations and proceed with the registration of cases.

After preliminary verification during a field visit in the area, the CBI has registered the first FIR in such allegations of land grab and assault on women handed over to it by the Calcutta High Court.

High Court had also directed the CBI to file a comprehensive report on the alleged illegal conversion of agricultural land into water bodies for pisciculture after conducting a thorough inspection of revenue records and physical inspection of land alleged to have been converted. —*PTI*

6 killed in fire at Patna hotel

PATNA, 25 APRIL

Six people, including three women, died in a major fire that broke out on Thursday inside a hotel, situated close to a railway station in Patna, police said.

According to Chandra Prakash, SP (City Central), Patna, rescue work is over at the hotel near Patna Junction, where the blaze had erupted around 11am with more than 20 people trapped inside.

"The deceased include three women. In addition, two people with severe burn injuries are in a critical condition, and they have been admitted to hospital," Prakash said.

Police are trying to ascertain the identity of the deceased and the critically injured persons so that family members could be informed, he said.

PHOTO: PTI

"We are not able to pinpoint the reason that may have led to the fire. Forensic experts have been called and based on their findings, we will take further action," SP added. —*PTI*

Unauthorised hawkers can't take over footpaths, HC suggests pop-up markets

MUMBAI, 25 APRIL

Footpaths and public roads in Mumbai cannot be allowed to be taken over by unauthorised hawkers permanently, the Bombay High Court has said, suggesting that the city's civic body consider the idea of a pop-up market or mobile vending concept.

A division bench of Justices Gautam Patel and Kamal in its order of 16 April, a copy of which was made available on Thursday, said the constitutional right of one person cannot mean violation of the right to a free and safe footpath for pedestrians.

The bench last year had taken suo motu (on its own) cognizance of the issue of illegal vendors in the city.

A woman standing amid the debris of the temporary shops demolished by NMMC during an anti-encroachment drive in Navi Mumbai **Photo: PTI**

It said a fundamental question that arises in the petition is "who is this city for" as there are rival contestants for this space.

Apart from anything else, this will create a conflict within Article 21 and within Article 14 of the Constitution, it said.

—*PTI*

TAMANNAAH SUMMONED IN IPL STREAMING CASE

MUMBAI, 25 APRIL

Maharashtra cyber cell has summoned actor Tamannaah Bhatia in connection with the alleged promotion of the viewing of IPL matches on a subsidiary app of the Mahadev online gaming and betting application, officials said on Thursday.

The actor has been asked to appear before the Maharashtra cyber personnel on 29 April.

The actor has been called to record her statement as a witness in the case, an official said. —*PTI*

AFRICAN SPECIAL

Gandhisagar sanctuary to get 5-8 cheetahs

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

As many as five to eight cheetahs will be released into a fenced area in the Gandhisagar Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh possibly in the second half of the year with a focus on the breeding of animals and favourable weather.

A South African delegation reached India on Tuesday to review preparations at Gandhisagar for the introduction of cheetahs and the progress of the project in the Kuno National Park.

South African delegation met Indian officials in New Delhi, and discussions focused on strengthening collaboration between two countries especially Project Cheetah.

A 64 square-km enclosure is being prepared at Gandhisagar which is about a six-hour drive from Kuno. It is spread across 368 square kilometre and has an additional 2,500 sq km area surrounding it.

The habitat around the fenced area in a protected area (PA), and animals will be released into free-ranging conditions in phases after ecological restoration and prey recovery, they said.

According to a document released by the Union Environment Ministry, the long-term goal is to establish a metapopulation of cheetahs in the Kuno-Gandhisagar landscape (area around 9,000 square km) of 60-70 individuals after restorative measures, prey availability, and scientific management are ensured.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The current action plan, following the broad framework of the earlier action plan for the introduction of cheetahs in India, has been modified and formulated based on the experiences learned from Kuno suited for the site-specific requirements of Gandhisagar in consonance with the overarching guidelines of IUCN on reintroductions and conservation translocations, the document read.

Project Cheetah aims to reintroduce the only large carnivore species that went extinct in independent. The first batch of eight cheetahs was introduced in India in September 2022, and the second batch of 12 cheetahs was flown in from South Africa last February. —*PTI.*

Rtd director of MNC loses Rs 25 crore in cyber attack

MUMBAI, 25 APRIL

A retired director of a multinational company (MNC) residing in Mumbai lost nearly Rs 25 crore to cyber fraudsters, who posed as police and CBI officers and intimidated her saying she was being probed in a money laundering case, officials said on Thursday.

Police say this is one of the biggest cyber fraud cases targeting an individual in the city in recent times.

According to them, the victim sold her and her mother's shares and mutual fund investments and even took out a gold loan to pay money to the scammers.

The incident occurred during a two-month period starting 6 February this year, a police official said.

"The complainant, who stays in a western suburb, received a WhatsApp call with the caller posing as an official of the telecom department, who told her that her three mobile numbers will be deactivated. When the victim, who is a senior citizen, sought to know the reason, the caller told her that he was connecting the call to a police officer," he said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: x/@ kompellaMadhaviLatha

BJP's Madhavi Latha of Hyd has ₹221 cr assets

HYDERABAD, 25 APRIL

BJP's candidate for the Hyderabad Lok Sabha seat, Kompella Madhavi Latha owns family assets of Rs 221.37 crore, making her one of the richest candidates in Telangana. She, her husband Kompella Viswanath, both business persons, and their three dependent children, have movable assets of Rs 165.46 crore and the couple has immovable assets of Rs.55.91 crore.Madhavi Latha revealed details of the family assets in an affidavit submitted to the Election Commission on Wednesday while filing her nomination. The 49-year-old, who resides in the twin city of Secunderabad, recently joined the BJP and is making her electoral debut.—*IANS*

Sunita Kejriwal likely to join AAP's campaign in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Aam Aadmi Party's campaigning for the Lok Sabha polls will get a boost with Sunita Kejriwal likely to hold roadshows in Delhi beginning this weekend in the absence of her husband Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, party leaders said on Thursday. Sunita is slowly emerging out of the shadows to assume a bigger role to give a fillip to the AAP's campaigning which has been affected by Kejriwal's arrest by Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case in March. Sunita will also attend roadshows in the other three Lok Sabha seats contested by the AAP in Delhi, he said. Sunita Kejriwal has been acting as a channel of communication between her husband and AAP and its MLAs. She has so far held three digital media briefings mainly focusing on communicating Chief Minister's messages to the people and his ministers.—*PTI*

J-K: Cops on alert, drones, sniffer dogs being used

JAMMU, 25 APRIL

Ahead of the voting in Jammu during the second phase of Lok Sabha elections, the security personnel are on high alert and are carrying out patrolling in vulnerable areas. Special Operations Group of Jammu and Kashmir Police are patrolling in vulnerable areas to thwart any nefarious designs of adversaries.J&K Police is using drones to monitor the area and special dogs are also being used to clear any IED threats ahead of the voting.Jammu will go to polls during the second phase of Lok Sabha elections on 26 April. Through the passage of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 in Parliament, Article 370, which gave special constitutional privileges to the erstwhile state, ceased to exist.—*ANI*

LG office has cancelled mayoral polls: AAP alleges

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday alleged that the Lt Governor's office has "cancelled" the 26 April mayoral polls of Municipal Corporation of Delhi. "BJP got this election cancelled despite there being permission from Election Commission. LG office has cancelled the polls saying he works on the advice of the chief minister. There have been previous instances where he has not followed the aid and advice of the chief minister," AAP MCD in-charge Durgesh Pathak claimed at a press conference. There was no immediate reaction from the LG officer on the allegations. Pathak said that the post of the mayor in the second term is reserved for councillor from reserved category. AAP has fielded Mahesh Khichi for the post of mayor and Ravinder Bhardwaj for deputy mayor of MCD.—*PTI*

At ₹1.35 lakh cr, this is the costliest election ever

This is more than double the ₹60,000 crore spent in 2019

KOLKATA, 25 APRIL

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections are on track to break past records and become the most expensive electoral event in the world, according to a poll expert.

The estimated expenditure is expected to reach a staggering Rs 1.35 lakh crore, more than double the Rs 60,000 crore spent in 2019, claimed N Bhaskara Rao, who chairs the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), a not-for-profit organisation, and has been tracking election spending for 35 years.

Rao stated that this comprehensive expenditure encompasses all spending, direct or indirect, related to polls, including that by political parties and organisations, candidates, the government, and the Election Commission.

With the BJP vying for a third consecutive term under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, industry observers have noted the party's dominant presence in campaigns, irrespective of the mediums used for publicity.

In an interview with PTI, Rao said he revised the initial expenditure estimate from Rs 1.2 lakh crore to Rs 1.35 lakh crore, factoring in electoral bond disclosures and accounting for all election-related expenses.

Polling officials leave for their respective polling stations ahead of the 2nd phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Kochi, on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

- Rao emphasised that money flowed into the process through various means beyond electoral bonds

Rao emphasised that money flowed into the process through various means beyond electoral bonds.

Recent observations by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) revealed a "significant lack of transparency" in political funding in India.

From 2004-05 to 2022-23, approximately 60 per cent of contributions to the nation's six major political parties, totalling Rs 19,083 crore, came from undisclosed sources, including funds from electoral bonds, it claimed.

The ADR has, however, refrained from providing any cumulative expenditure projections for the ensuing Lok Sabha elections.

"Pre-election activities are integral to campaign spending by parties and candidates, covering political rallies, transportation, hiring of workers including field and influencers and even the controversial horse-trading of political leaders," Rao said.

The Election Commission's budget to manage the polls is expected to be 10-15 per cent of the total expenditure projection, he added.

With a voter base of 96.6 crore, per-voter spending is estimated at around Rs 1,400. This surpasses the expenditure of the 2020 US elections, which stood at USD 14.4 billion or Rs 1.2 lakh crore, according to OpenSecrets.org, a nonprofit organisation based in Washington, DC, that tracks and publishes data on campaign finance and lobbying.

—*PTI*

WITH KEJRI STILL IN JAIL

AAP beneficiary of crimes in excise scam, says ED

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is the "major beneficiary" of the proceeds of crime generated in the alleged Delhi excise policy scam and has committed the offence of money laundering through its national convenor Arvind Kejriwal, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has told the Supreme Court.

The ED has claimed the investigation done so far has revealed a part of proceeds of crime-- cash totalling around Rs 45 crore -- was utilised in the AAP's 2022 Goa assembly poll campaign.

Reacting to the ED's affidavit filed in the apex court, the AAP alleged the probe agency has become "a machine for telling lies".

In a reply affidavit filed in the top court on Kejriwal's plea challenging his arrest in a money laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam, the ED has claimed statements of various persons engaged in the campaign related activities by AAP in Goa have revealed that cash payments were made to them for the work they did as survey workers, area managers, assembly managers etc.

"The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is the major beneficiary of the proceeds of crime generated in the Delhi liquor scam. Part of the proceeds of crime to the tune of cash of Rs 45 cr approx. has been utilised in the election campaign of AAP in Goa Assembly elections 2022," it said. —*PTI*

"In this manner, AAP has committed the offence of money laundering through Arvind Kejriwal and the offences thus are covered by section 70, PMLA 2002," the ED said.

Section 70 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) deals with offences by companies.

The ED said AAP is a political party comprising association of individuals registered under section 29-A of the Representation of the People Act 1951.

It said under section 29-A of the 1951 Act, only an association or body of citizens of India can make an application for registration as a political party and since AAP is an association of such individuals it got itself registered under the Act, more particularly under section 29-A.—*PTI*

FILLING NOMINATIONS

Samajwadi Party chief and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Akhilesh Yadav files his nomination for Lok Sabha elections, in Kannauj, on Thursday; YSRCP chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy also filed his nomination for Pulivendula Assembly seat **PHOTOS: PTI**

JDU leader shot dead in Patna, 1 injured

NEW DELHI,25 APRIL

Janata Dal-United (JDU) leader Saurabh Kumar was shot dead by bike-borne assailants in Patna on Wednesday night, police said.

Police said that Saurabh Kumar was returning from a wedding reception function when the attack was carried out. One person who accompanied the JDU leader was also injured in the incident.

"Saurabh Kumar came with his friends to attend a reception function. While returning he was shot by unidentified assailants who were on a motorcycle. Then he was taken to hospital and one other person named Munmun Kumar also sustained injuries. They were taken to Kankarbagh Uma hospital, however, by then Saurabh Kumar died. We are examining the matter," SDPO Masaurhi, Kanhaiya Singh said.

—*ANI*

Kharge writes letter to Modi, seeks time to explain Cong's 'Nyay Patra'

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and sought time from him to explain in person the party's 'Nyay Patra'.

In his two-page letter, he told Modi that he is being misinformed by his advisers about things that are not even written in the Congress' manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections.

The Congress' 'Nyay Patra' aims at providing "nyay (justice)" to the youngsters, women, farmers, labourers and marginalised people across all castes and communities, he said.

The Congress Chief said in his letter to the Prime Minister, "It has become your habit to seize on a few words taken out of context and create a communal divide. You are lowering the dignity of the chair by speaking in this manner."

The Congress's 'Nyay Patra' aims at providing "nyay (justice)" to the youngsters, women, farmers, labourers and marginalised **PHOTO: PTI**

"You are being misinformed by your advisors about things that are not even written in our manifesto. I would be more than happy to meet you in person to explain our 'Nyay Patra' so that, as prime minister of the country, you don't make any statements that are false," Kharge said.

The Congress chief also said he is neither shocked nor surprised by the language used by Modi in his recent speeches.

"It was expected that you and other leaders from your party would start speaking in this manner after you saw the dismal performance of the BJP in the first phase of the elections," Kharge said in the letter. — *PTI*

CONGRESS SLAMS MODI'S 'STEADFAST ADHERENCE TO LIES'

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Congress on Thursday termed as "lies" Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks that former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had abolished inheritance tax after his mother Indira Gandhi's death to save her wealth from going to the government, as it cited then finance minister's budget speech on abolition of the estate duty.

Addressing an election rally in Madhya Pradesh's Morena city, Modi also said that after benefitting from it, Congress now wants to impose inheritance tax again on the people of the country. If Congress comes to power, it will snatch more than half of the earnings of people through inheritance tax, he said. Hitting back at Modi, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said INCIndia wanted to impose an Inheritance Tax. —*ANI*

Will end reservation for Muslims in T'gana: Shah

SIDDIPET, 25 APRIL

- Amit Shah accused Congress of making Telangana an "ATM of Delhi"

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Thursday that BJP will end reservation for Muslims in Telangana and provide the benefit to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes.

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy had said last month that Congress government in the state would protect the four per cent reservation for Muslims in education and employment.

In his remarks, Amit Shah accused Congress of making Telangana an "ATM of Delhi".

He said BJP-led government has worked to eliminate pending problems in the country.

Shah accused Congress of not probing "scams" committed by the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi government. Telangana Rashtra Samithi later changed its name to Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS).

"Of all the scams committed by TRS, Congress is not investigating even one. Both TRS and Congress are together. Modiji will work for freeing Telangana from corruption. Both Congress and TRS do not celebrate Telangana Liberation Day because they are afraid of Majlis (AIMIM)," he said, adding that BJP-led government has decided that it will celebrate 17 September as Telangana Liberation Day.

He said people of Telangana have decided to elect BJP candidates in the Lok Sabha polls.

Polling for 17 parliamentary constituencies in Telangana will be held on 13 May. —*ANI*

NCP unveils manifesto; focuses on caste census

PUNE, 25 APRIL

The Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) on Thursday unveiled its manifesto, favouring caste census and promising a separate commission for farmers' welfare, right to apprenticeship, 50 per cent reservation for women in jobs.

The Sharad Pawar-led party said it supports full statehood for Jammu and Kashmir and rejects the idea of 'one nation, one election'.

As per the manifesto, titled "Shapatnama", the NCP (SP) will review and propose changes to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), National Register for Citizens (NRC), Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and other laws "conflicting" with the constitutional principles.

It also mentioned that the party advocates empowering state and local governments, reviewing power distribution and enforcing constitutional amendments.

"We will demand a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations. We will ban contract labour in government sectors and legally protect the contract workers' benefits," Maharashtra NCP(SP) president Jayant Patil said addressing a press conference here.

PHOTO: ANI

The manifesto, unveiled in the presence of NCP (SP) chief and former Union agriculture minister Sharad Pawar, also favours caste census, scrapping of the Agnipath scheme, safety audit for women and strengthening cyber laws related to them.

Patil said if the party gets a chance to be in power at the Centre, it would give the Goods and Services Tax (GST) a "human face".

—*ANI*

KERALA OPPN SEEKS ACTION AGAINST DELHI LT GUV

T'PURAM, 25 APRIL

On the eve of polling day in Kerala, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly VD Satheesan on Thursday urged the Election Commission to take action against Delhi's Lt Governor for allegedly visiting heads of churches in the southern state to "lure" them to take a stand in favour of BJP in the Lok Sabha elections on 26 April.

Senior Congress leader Satheesan, in a letter to the Commission, alleged "blatant violation of the model code of conduct" by Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena through his meeting of church heads in Kerala."I am writing to invite your attention to the blatant violation of the model code of conduct by the Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena by visiting various church heads in Kerala to lure them to take a stance in favour of BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections," the opposition leader said in his complaint. —*PTI*

FOR AMETHI, RAE BARELI?

Gandhi siblings may fight from UP

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Congress leaders Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Rahul Gandhi are likely to contest the Lok Sabha election from Rae Bareli and Amethi seats, respectively, sources said on Thursday.

According to the sources, the final decision will be taken after 26 April and nominations can be filed next week. Phase 2 of the election is scheduled for 26 April. In this phase Wayanad from where Rahul Gandhi is contesting will go to the polls.

Smriti Irani defeated Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from Amethi. Irani has again been fielded by BJP from the seat.

As per the seat agreement between Samajwadi Party and Congress in Uttar Pradesh, Congress will contest 17 seats and the Samajwadi Party the remaining 63 seats in the electorally crucial state.

Apart from its traditional strongholds of Rae Bareli and Amethi, the Congress is also contesting on Varanasi, Ghaziabad and Kanpur.

According to the sources, the final decision will be taken after 26 April and nominations can be filed next week **PHOTO: PTI**

Earlier, posters featuring Robert Vadra, husband of Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, appeared outside the party's office on Wednesday in the Gauriganj area of Amethi. This raised speculations of a possible ticket for Vadra.

However, Congress appears to put up a fight for every seat that it is contesting and has thus decided on fielding the Gandhi sibling.

Amethi and Rae Bareli Lok Sabha constituencies will vote in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on 20 May

—*ANI*

PHASE 2 PREPARATIONS

Polling officials leave for election duty on the eve of the 2nd phase of Lok Sabha polls, in Mangaluru, on Thursday
PHOTO: PTI

FSSAI under fire for raising limit of pesticide in spices

FFSAI increased the maximum pesticides in herbs, spices by a whopping 10 times ***PHOTO: X/ @SUDHAKARUDUMULA***

Much to the outrage of activists and scientists, the Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) increased the maximum residue limit (MRL) of pesticides in herbs and spices by a whopping 10 times.

The order dated 8 April, 2024, revealed that the MRL of pesticides has increased substantially from 0.01 milligrammes per kilogramme (mg / kg) to 0.1 mg / kg. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defined MRL as the highest legally tolerable level of pesticide in food or animal feed.

Amit Khurana, programme director of sustainable food systems at the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, told Down to Earth (DTE), if the FSSAI is relaxing the limit, then ultimately it allows for more pesticides to be ingested into the human body with severe health implications. "If you are making such a huge upward revision, then you have to substantiate it by releasing the data based on which the decision was made," he said, adding:

Data for changing values, if increased, should have been provided.

The MRLs of pesticides for food and commodities, including species and culinary herbs, are specified under the Food Safety and Standards (Contaminants, Toxins and Residues) Regulation, 2011. These MRLs are fixed based on the field trial data received through the Central Insecticides Board and Registration Committee (CIBRC), Union Ministry of Agriculture and Family Welfare, the FSSAI stated in its order. There is no declared procedure of using this data to fix MRLs, said Narasimha Reddy Donthi, an independent researcher and environmental justice activist.

A letter penned by the Pesticide Action Network of India objected to this mandate, saying that CIBRC does not conduct field trials of pesticides. The manufacturing companies generally provide the data, which is reviewed by CIBRC to approve pesticides. The CIBRC never sets any limits on residues, the letter implied. Its approval does not refer to residues at all, it highlighted.

However, for certain pesticides without field trial data available, the MRL was arrived at based on data generated by the Centre's Monitoring of Pesticide Residues at National Level (MPRNL) scheme, the order explained. But MPRNL does not have data on all pesticides and neither does it include spices in monitoring, Donthi said.

FSSAI, in a previous order dated 21 April, 2022, had categorically mentioned most of India's pesticides lack field trial data. Till such time that they can generate this data, MRIs specified by Codex Alimentarius, a collection of internationally adopted food standards, are to be applied. It was established by FAO and the World Health Organization in 1961. In the absence of Codex, regulating authorities in the country of export will specify the MRLs.

Further, the latest order clarified that for food commodities besides spices and culinary herbs, the MRL of 0.1 mg / kg specified is applicable under Codex.

Moreover, the order also said that if the pesticide is not registered with CIBRC, then the MRL of 0.1 mg / kg will be applicable for the spices and herbs, which activists DTE spoke with strongly opposed.

The aforementioned letter authored by the chief executive of the network AD Dileep Kumar and Donthi, posed a question: Why the pesticides not registered with the CIBRC are being given MRLs at all? Khurana concurred. "What is not registered should not be used."

The letter indicated that the amount of pesticides found in food commodities has been increasing over the years, adding that information is scarce.

Moving forward, speaking to DTE, Donthi recommended that the FSSAI should set zero MRLs for pesticides that are not approved and 0.01 mg / kg for pesticides that are approved for usage by CIBRC.

The feasibility and implications of this order need to be studied in detail considering import and export, said Kumar. "The one point that we mentioned in our response is that if India is diluting the MRS standards, our export market will reject the products from India. At the same time, importers will gain."

Several foreign governments have imposed trade restrictions on Indian food that are high in pesticide residue. Recently, the Singapore government recalled Indian spice maker Everest's fish curry masala after the carcinogenic pesticide ethylene oxide was detected. Before that, Hong Kong's food regulatory body also raised its concerns about the same group 1 carcinogen found in India's MDH Pvt Ltd food products.

—Downtoearth

SALAR ساہر

Global food crisis: 1 out of 5 people in need of care

Nearly 282 million people faced high levels of acute food insecurity in 59 countries in 2023, with extreme weather being the second most significant factor driving food crisis, revealed the 2024 Global Report on Food Crisis (GRFC) released 24 April, 2024.

The overall share of the analysed population facing high levels of acute food insecurity was marginally lower than in 2022, but still higher than pre-COVID-19. In fact, for four consecutive years, the proportion of people facing acute food insecurity has remained persistently high at almost 22 per cent of those assessed, significantly exceeding pre-COVID-19 levels.

With food crisis escalating alarmingly in conflict hotspots in 2023, notably Palestine (Gaza Strip) and Sudan, conflict / insecurity became the primary driver in 20 countries, directly affecting 135 million people. The Gaza Strip became the area with the most severe food crisis in the last eight years of GRFC reporting.

Meanwhile, weather extremes were the main driver for 18 countries, with over 72 million people facing high levels of acute food insecurity because of such extreme weather events. The El Nino event and climate change-related weather phenomena made 2023 the hottest year on record and many countries were grappling with prolonged recovery from drought or flooding.

El Nino conditions, currently prevailing over the equatorial Pacific region, are generally responsible for warmer temperatures in many places around the world, including in India.

The report analysed a population of 1.3 billion in 2023 across 59 countries. The share of analysed population facing high levels of acute food insecurity was marginally lower than in 2022. However, the number of people affected increased by 24 million since 2022, marking the fifth consecutive year of rising numbers.

Overall, 1 in 5 people assessed were in need of critical urgent action.

This year-on-year increase was mainly explained by increased analysis coverage, as well as deterioration in some countries / territories outweighing improvements in others.

Acute food insecurity deteriorated in 12 countries with comparable data between 2022 and 2023, where 13.5 million more people needed urgent assistance, mostly in Sudan.

Sudan is facing one of the worst food crises in the world, with almost a third of the population in need of emergency food aid. The armed conflict in the African country began a year ago, entered its southeastern regions, which is known as the nation's breadbasket.

Southeastern Sudan contributes over half of Sudan's total cereal production and is the main area for national grain storage.

Largely driven by conflict situation in both Sudan and Gaza, the number of forcibly displaced people reached 90 million in the 59 countries, the highest in eight years of GRFC reporting – highlighting the high correlation between displacement and acute food insecurity. Sudan became the world's biggest internal displacement crisis. And by the end of 2023, almost 80 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip was internally displaced.

An Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis published in March 2024 warned of a further devastating deterioration, with famine imminent between March and May 2024 in North Gaza and a risk of famine across the rest of the Gaza Strip. Half of the population (about 1.1 million people) were estimated to be experiencing catastrophic acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 5).

IPC is a standardised scale developed by United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization for improving food security analysis and decision making.

After conflict and weather extremes, economic shocks were the third main driver in 21 countries, mostly low-income and import-dependent, where decreasing global food prices did not transmit. Economic shocks led to over 75 million people facing high levels of acute food insecurity.

"This crisis demands an urgent response. Using the data in this report to transform food systems and address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition will be vital," said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Meanwhile, food security improved in 17 countries with comparable data between 2022 and 2023, resulting in 7.2 million fewer people facing high levels of acute food insecurity.

GRFC is produced annually by the Food Security Information Network and launched by the Global Network Against Food Crises – a multistakeholder initiative that includes United Nations agencies, the European Union, the United States Agency for International Development and non-governmental agencies working to tackle food crises.

—Downtoearth

Acute food insecurity deteriorated in 12 countries where 13.5 million needed urgent assistance, mostly in Sudan ***PHOTO: X/ @MHDKSAFA***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Gulf workers: The unlikely voters parties are wooing for elections

As the southern Indian state votes on 26 April, thousands are flying back from the Gulf to cast their ballot. Could they shape the election?

The hum of conversation was replaced by a crescendo of high-pitched political slogans in the packed auditorium, as Shafi Parambil took to the stage.

The 41-year-old politician from the Indian National Congress launched into a blistering attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Kerala state Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. "Every vote counts and I need your wholehearted support," he said as he concluded his speech.

It could have been a typical campaign event – ahead of 26 April, when Kerala votes in the second of the country's seven-phase national election – except it was not. Parambil was addressing supporters in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, 2,800km (1,739 miles) away from Vadakara, the parliamentary seat in Kerala he is contesting.

The Gulf region, which hosts more than 2 million immigrants from Kerala, is witnessing intense physical and virtual election campaigns, with contestants like Parambil vying for their votes and community groups launching initiatives to help expatriates fly back to India to cast their ballots.

Shafi Parambil, Congress candidate from Vadakara, Kerala addresses an election campaign in UAE; a packed auditorium listens to Shafi Parambil ***PHOTO: AL JAZEERA/ KMCC***

Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre (KMCC) is the biggest diaspora organisation in the Gulf, with more than 700,000 members. The group plans to fly back at least 10,000 of its members to Kerala by Friday.

KMCC is affiliated with Indian Union Muslim League, a prominent political party in Kerala that is allied with the Congress – Parambil's party – in the state and nationally. Congress, which is the principal national Opposition party, and also in Opposition in Kerala, is one of the state's two big political forces: the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF), currently in power in Kerala, is the other.

The group's units in Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have also booked flights to take voters from Kerala home. Some of these country-specific chapters are offering free tickets, while others are promising heavy discounts secured after negotiations with travel operators.

Unlike many other countries, India does not have voting at its overseas embassies. That means members of the diaspora need to travel back to India to cast their ballots.

> Unlike many other countries, India does not have voting at its overseas embassies. That means members of the diaspora need to travel back to India to cast their ballots

Most do not do this. Of the 13.4 million Indian citizens who live abroad, only 118,439 – less than 1 percent – have registered to vote this year, according to India's Election Commission. And only a fraction of them will likely actually vote. In the last national election in 2019, of the 99,844 expatriate voters, only 25,606 exercised took part.

Diaspora organisations also help finance poll campaigns in Kerala. In the Nadapuram village of Vadakara, expatriate-funded hoardings feature Parambil, the Congress candidate, and K K Shylaja, his communist opponent.

NRIs 'being denied' constitutional rights

Those who are not able to take the "vote flights" do not sit idle in the Gulf either.

Farooq Hamadani, the vice president of KMCC's Kuwait chapter, said members of his organisation who are not going home to vote are canvassing for their candidates using technology and social media. "Our members will call their friends and family members regularly to ensure votes for our party's candidates. We also have a social media cell to push content that is relevant to Kerala," Migrant researchers say the practice of expats – whether individuals or community groups representing them – spending huge amounts of money to use their voting rights does not augur well for the world's largest democracy. In effect, said Irudaya Rajan, an expert on migration and chair of the Thiruvananthapuram-based International Institute of Migration and Development (IIMAD), this discriminates against those who cannot travel to India during election time.

In 2017, the Indian government, following a recommendation from the Election Commission, introduced a bill in parliament to allow Indian nationals abroad to appoint proxies to vote for them. Though the bill was passed in the lower house the next year, it lapsed in Rajya Sabha, the upper house. *—Al Jazeera*

PHOTO: VNA/VNS PHOTO

$40m fraud: Vietnam tycoon jailed for 8 years

HANOI, 25 APRIL

Vietnam's top soft drinks tycoon was jailed for eight years on Thursday in a $40m fraud case – the latest high-profile business figure snared in the country's sweeping crackdown on corruption. The communist nation's wide-ranging campaign to wipe out endemic corruption has seen more than 4,400 people charged with criminal offences, including officials and senior business figures. A court in Ho Chi Minh City found Tran Qui Thanh and his two daughters guilty of scamming investors over loans issued in 2019 and 2020. *—Al Jazeera*

26 pilot whales die after mass stranding in Aus

CANBERRA, 25 APRIL

At least 26 long-finned pilot whales have died, but several others were rescued, after 160 of them were stranded over a large area in Western Australia. Dozens of whales were stuck in shallow water on Thursday morning spread across about 500 metres (0.31 miles) at Toby Inlet in Geographe Bay near Dunsborough. The region is less than 250km (155 miles) south of state capital Perth. Footage from the area showed wildlife preservation teams and local authorities joined by many volunteers to help them get back to deeper waters. Pia Courtis, a spokesperson for the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, said samples would be taken from the deceased whales before removing them from the pods throughout their lives.*—Al Jazeera*

Poland seeks agency on EU agenda

WARSAW, 25 APRIL,

Poland's Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski told parliament on Thursday that the government wants to return to the group of countries which sets the agenda of the European Union, laying out the government's vision at a historically crucial moment with war across the border in Ukraine.

He warned that a Russian attack on NATO would end in defeat for Moscow, but NATO must increase its defences.

Sikorski, whose speech was aimed at both the world and the domestic audience in the nation of 38 million people located along a geopolitical fault line, was seeking to explain how Poland's priorities changed after Tusk's government replaced a national conservative party, led by the Law and Justice party, in respect to rule of law and international relations.

Poland, a member of NATO and the European Union, is on the eastern flank of both and shares borders — *AP*

Runaway military horses in UK undergo surgery

LONDON, 25 APRIL

Two of the four riderless horses that bolted during a routine exercise causing mayhem on the streets of central London have undergone surgery but are expected to return to duty in due course, the British Army said in a statement on Thursday. Scenes of a blood-covered horse galloping alongside another along Aldwych near the High Commission of India and the West End theatre district were shared widely on social media on Wednesday after the horses collided with cars and smashed into a tourist bus. The Army said three soldiers injured when they were unseated from their horses are on the road to recovery. "Of the seven horses which were spooked, five tried to bolt and four broke loose. *—PTI*

Hamas bats for 2-state solution in Israel

This is a significant concession by the group officially committed to Israel's destruction

ISTANBUL, 25 APR

A top Hamas political official told The Associated Press the Islamic militant group is willing to agree to a truce of five years or more with Israel and that it would lay down its weapons and convert into a political party if an independent Palestinian state is established along pre-1967 borders.

The comments by Khalil al-Hayya in an interview Wednesday came amid a stalemate in months of cease-fire talks. The suggestion that Hamas would disarm appeared to be a significant concession by the militant group officially committed to Israel's destruction.

But it's unlikely Israel would consider such a scenario. It has vowed to crush Hamas following the deadly 7 October attacks that triggered the war, and its current leadership is adamantly opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state on lands Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

Al-Hayya, a high-ranking Hamas official who has represented the Palestinian militants in negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage exchange, struck a sometimes defiant and other times conciliatory tone.

> **"All the experiences of people who fought against occupiers, when they became independent and obtained their rights and their state, what have these forces done? They have turned into political parties and their defending fighting forces have turned into the national army,"**
>
> -Khalil al-Hayya

Khalil al-Hayya
PHOTO: X@QudsNen

Speaking to the AP in Istanbul, Al-Hayya said Hamas wants to join the Palestine Liberation Organization, headed by the rival Fatah faction to form a unified government for Gaza and the West Bank. He said Hamas would accept "a fully sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the return of Palestinian refugees in accordance with the international resolutions," along Israel's pre-1967 borders.

If that happens, he said, the group's military wing would dissolve.

"All the experiences of people who fought against occupiers, when they became independent and obtained their rights and their state, what have these forces done? They have turned into political parties and their defending fighting forces have turned into the national army," he said.

Over the years, Hamas has sometimes moderated its public position with respect to the possibility of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. But its political program still officially "rejects any alternative to the full liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea" — referring to the area reaching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, which includes lands that now make up Israel.

Al-Hayya did not say whether his apparent embrace of a two-state solution would amount to an end to the Palestinian conflict with Israel or an interim step toward the group's stated goal of destroying Israel.

There was no immediate reaction from Israel or the Palestinian Authority — the internationally recognized self-ruled government that Hamas drove out when it seized Gaza in 2007, a year after winning Palestinian parliamentary elections.

The Palestinian Authority hopes to establish an independent state in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza — areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war. While the international community overwhelmingly supports such a two-state solution, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line government rejects it.

— *AP*

Fresh attack on US, Israeli vessels: Houthis

SANA'A, 25 APRIL

Yahya Saree
PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi armed group says it attacked US and Israeli vessels, with a Western coalition of warships defending amid the continuing fallout from the war on Gaza.

Yahya Saree, the group's military spokesman, said in a video address late on Wednesday that the Houthis hit the Maersk Yorktown cargo ship in the Gulf of Aden.

The US military confirmed that the Houthis launched an antiship ballistic missile from their territory towards the vessel, which it identified as a "US-flagged, owned, and operated vessel with 18 US and four Greek crew members".

"There were no injuries or damage reported by US, coalition, or commercial ships," the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement.

The Greek Ministry of National Defence said on Thursday that one of the country's military ships serving in the European Union's naval mission to counter the Houthis in the Red Sea intercepted two drones launched towards a commercial ship from Yemen.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) had earlier confirmed an incident some 72 nautical miles (133km) southeast of the port of Djibouti in the Gulf of Aden.

Saree said the group targeted the Israeli ship MSC Veracruz in the Indian Ocean and launched projectiles at a US warship.

The US military said within two hours of the attack on the Maersk Yorktown, its forces "successfully engaged and destroyed" four drones over Yemen.

—Al Jazeera

US campuses turn to cops to quell protest

AUSTIN (US), 25 APRIL,

Student protesters doubled down early on Thursday on their discontent of the Israel-Hamas war on campuses across the country as universities were quick to call in the police to end the demonstrations and make arrests.

At Columbia University in New York, students defiantly erected an encampment where many are set to graduate in front of families in just a few weeks. The University continued to negotiate with students after several failed attempts, and over 100 arrests, to clear the encampment, but several universities ousted demonstrators Wednesday, swiftly turning to law enforcement when protests bubbled up on their campuses.

Police peacefully arrested student protesters at the University of Southern California, hours after officers at the University of Texas at Austin aggressively detained dozens in the latest clashes between law enforcement and those protesting the Israel-Hamas war on campuses nationwide.

Law enforcement carry a pro-Palestinian protester at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. *PHOTO:X@CORINNE_PERKINS*

Tensions were already high at USC after the university cancelled a planned commencement speech by the school's valedictorian, who publicly supports Palestine, citing safety concerns. After scuffles with police early Wednesday, a few dozen demonstrators standing in a circle with locked arms were detained one by one without incident later in the evening.

Hours earlier in Texas, hundreds of local and state police — including some on horseback and holding batons — bulldozed into protesters, at one point sending some tumbling into the street.

Harvard University in Massachusetts had sought to stay ahead of protests this week by limiting access to Harvard Yard and requiring permission for tents and tables. That didn't stop protesters from setting up a camp with 14 tents Wednesday following a rally against the university's suspension of the Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee. *—AP*

282 million in Gaza faced acute hunger in 2023: UN

UN, 25 APRIL

Nearly 282 million people in 59 countries suffered from acute hunger in 2023, with war-torn Gaza as the territory with the largest number of people facing famine, according to the Global Report on Food Crises.

The UN report said 24 million more people faced an acute lack of food than in 2022, due to the sharp deterioration in food security, especially in the Gaza Strip and Sudan.

Máximo Torero, chief economist for the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation, said 705,000 people in five countries are at Phase 5, the highest level, on a scale of hunger determined by international experts — the highest number since the global report began in 2016. Over 80 per cent of those facing imminent famine — 577,000 people — were in Gaza, he said.

—AP

Human Rights Watch has uncovered a harrowing account of Burkina Faso soldiers massacring over 200 civilians in a single day. *PHOTO: X@FatuNetwork*

223 civilians killed by Army in Burkina Faso

DAKAR 25 APRIL,

Military forces in Burkina Faso killed 223 civilians, including babies and many children, in attacks on two villages accused of co-operating with militants, Human Rights Watch said in a report published on Thursday.

The mass killings took place on 25 February in the country's northern villages of Nondin and Soro, and some 56 children were among the dead, according to the report. The human rights organisation called on the United Nations and the African Union to provide investigators and to support local efforts to bring those responsible to justice.

"The massacres in Nondin and Soro villages are just the latest mass killings of civilians by the Burkina Faso military in their counter-insurgency operations," Human Rights Watch Executive Director Tirana Hassan said.

The once-peaceful nation has been ravaged by violence that has pitted jihadis linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group against state-backed forces. Both sides have targeted civilians caught in the middle, displacing more than two million people, of which over

—AP

UN resolution to prevent N arms race in space vetoed

MOSCOW, 25 APRIL

Russia has vetoed a UN security council resolution calling on all nations to prevent a dangerous nuclear arms race in outer space, describing it as "a dirty spectacle".

The resolution, sponsored by the United States and Japan, would have called on all countries not to develop or deploy nuclear arms or other weapons of mass destruction in space, which are already banned under a 1967 international treaty.

"Today's veto begs the question: Why? Why, if you are following the rules, would you not support a resolution that reaffirms them? What could you possibly be hiding," US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, said after the vote.

Thomas-Greenfield made the comments after saying that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, had already stated that Moscow had no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space.

Russia's UN Ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, dismissed the resolution as "absolutely absurd and politicised," and said it didn't go far enough in banning all types of weapons in space.

Russia vetos UN resolution to prevent nuclear arms race in space
PHOTO: @P_COMMUNITYHUB

The vote in the 15-member Security Council was 13 in favour, Russia opposed and China abstaining.

Russia and China proposed an amendment that would call on all countries, especially those with major space capabilities, "to prevent for all time the placement of weapons in outer space, and the threat of use of force in outer spaces."

But the US opposed it and after the vote Nebenzia said: "We want a ban on the placement of weapons of any kind in outer space, not just WMDs [weapons of mass destruction]. But you don't want that. And let me ask you that very same question. Why?"

He said much of the US and Japan's actions become clear "if we recall that the US and their allies announced some time ago plans to place weapons … in outer space."

The US ambassador said before the vote that the world is just beginning to understand "the catastrophic ramifications of a nuclear explosion in space".

It could destroy "thousands of satellites operated by countries and companies around the world – and wipe out the vital communications, scientific, meteorological, agricultural, commercial, and national security services we all depend on," she said.

—AP

TOILET CLEANER MIXED IN KHAN'S WIFE'S FOOD

ISLAMABAD, 25 APR

Jailed former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi was reportedly given at least two to three drops of "toilet cleaner" mixed in an Iftar meal, her spokesperson said on Thursday.

The cleaner was allegedly mixed with her food on Shab-e-Barat on 24 February.

She claimed that after consuming the meal, her health deteriorated and it was getting worse every day.

Khan, 71, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, has many times claimed that Bushra Bibi, 49, was given food mixed with toilet cleaner.

The spokesperson said before her arrest, she did not have any problems, including blood pressure and diabetes.

"Since her arrest, Bushra Bibi's health has deteriorated, something must have happened," she said expressing her apprehension.

Bushra Bibi, convicted in two different cases, is being held at the Bani Gala home since the couple was sentenced in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case in February. The Bani Gala residence has been converted into a sub-jail for the former prime minister's wife.

—PTI

UNENDING SUMMER

Searing heat shuts schools for 33 mn kids

DHAKA, 25 APRIL

Searing heat has forced 33 million children out of schools in Bangladesh, as temperatures in parts of the country soared past 42C (108F).

Schools and colleges will be shut for at least until 27 April. This is the second year in a row that authorities made such a move due to extreme weather.

It follows school closures in the Philippines and India as a persistent heatwave sweeps across Asia.

"Children in Bangladesh are among the poorest in the world, and heat-related school closures should ring alarm bells for us all," said Shumon Sengupta, Save the Children's Bangladesh director.

The country's weather authorities issued its fourth heat alert for the month on Thursday.

Low-lying Bangladesh is one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a 30- to 45-cm rise in sea level could displace more than 35 million people from coastal districts - about a quarter of the country's total population.

Thousands of Bangladeshis gathered to pray for rain as an extreme heat wave hit the country

PHOTO: BBC

On Wednesday, thousands of Muslims in the country gathered in mosques and rural fields to pray for rain.

"Life has become unbearable due to lack of rains... Poor people are suffering immensely," Islamic cleric Muhammad Abu Yusuf sid.

Bangladesh's weather authorities expect the extreme heat to continue for at least another week.

Hospitals and clinics have been asked to prepare for a higher patient load due to heat-related illnesses such as fever and headache.

Unicef has warned that more than 243 million children across East Asia and the Pacific are at risk of heat-related illnesses and death.

Unusually high temperatures pose "grave risks" particularly to newborns and infants, *—BBC*

Rudy among 18 indicted in Arizona election scheme

NEW YORK, 25 APRIL

A grand jury in the state of Arizona has charged Donald Trump's chief of staff Mark Meadows, lawyer Rudy Giuliani and 16 others for their alleged roles in trying to overturn the former United States president's loss in the 2020 election.

The indictment released late on Wednesday by the state attorney general names 11 Republicans who submitted a document to Congress falsely declaring that Trump had won the key state in 2020.

They include the former state party chair, a 2022 US Senate candidate and two sitting state lawmakers. They are charged with nine counts each of conspiracy, fraud and forgery.

The identities of the seven others, including Giuliani and Meadows, were redacted by the attorney general because they had not yet been officially served with the documents, but they were easily identifiable based on their descriptions.

The indictment mentions the chief of staff in 2020, the position Meadows held in the Trump White House at that time. Trump himself was not charged but was referred to as an unindicted co-conspirator.

The charges were filed after a yearlong investigation by Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes, a Democrat, on the handling of the election by Republicans in the key swing state that President Joe Biden won in 2020 by a mere 10,457 votes. *—Al Jazeera*

PHOTO: REPRESENTAION

Rupee edges up 1 paisa at 83.32 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 25 APRIL

The rupee inched up 1 paisa to close at 83.32 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by continued selling pressure from foreign funds. Forex traders said foreign capital outflows also weighed on the rupee. However, a soft US dollar against key rivals overseas supported the domestic currency. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.34 against the greenback. Moving in a tight range, the unit hit an intra-day high of 83.31 and a low of 83.40 against the greenback. The local currency finally settled at 83.32 (provisional) against the dollar. On Wednesday, the rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled 2 paise lower at 83.33 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

Gold slips ₹110; silver jumps ₹350

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Gold price on Thursday slipped Rs 110 to Rs 72,500 per 10 grams in the national capital amid a decline in the precious metal rates globally, according to HDFC Securities.
In the previous session, the yellow metal had ended at Rs 72,610 per 10 grams.
However, silver prices bounced Rs 350 to Rs 84,100 per kg. It had closed at Rs 83,750 per kg in the previous close.
In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,319 per ounce, down USD 3 from the previous close. However, silver was marginally up at USD 27.20 per ounce. In the previous session, it had closed at USD 27.10 per ounce.
Traders will refrain from taking fresh position on the yellow metal ahead of the macro data from US. *—PTI*

Audi to hike vehicle prices by 2 pc from June

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

German automaker Audi on Thursday said it will hike prices of its model range in India by up to 2 per cent from June, in order to offset the impact of rising input and transportation costs. The price hike will be effective from 1 June, 2024, the automaker said in a statement. The price correction aims to ensure sustainable growth for the automaker and its dealer partners, he added. "It's our endeavour that the impact of rising costs is as minimal as possible for our customers," Dhillon said. Audi India retailed 7,027 units in FY24 posting an overall 33 per cent sales growth. The company sells models like A4, Q3, Q5, RS Q8 in India. *—PTI*

Godrej secures orders worth over ₹1K cr in FY'24

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Godrej Electricals & Electronics on Thursday said it has secured orders worth over Rs 1,000 crore in financial year 2023-24 in power and infrastructure business. These orders predominantly entail both Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) and Gas Insulated Switchgear (GIS) substations across India, with certain projects of up to 765kV capacity, a company statement said. Each of these projects range from Rs 100 crore to Rs 400 crore in value, it added. Mirji further noted that securing the inaugural 765kV GIS order for execution at Khavda, in Gujarat marks yet another significant milestone for the company, symbolising its dedication. These substations play a pivotal role in augmenting the capacity of the existing grid infrastructure, facilitating seamless integration and evacuation of renewable energy. *—PTI*

Kotak Bank shares tank 13 pc post RBI action

Market capitalisation erodes by ₹37,721 cr to 3.2 lakh cr

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Shares of Kotak Mahindra Bank on Thursday tanked 13 per cent after the RBI barred the firm from onboarding new customers through its online and mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards with immediate effect.

The stock plunged 12.10 per cent to its 52-week low of Rs 1,620 on the BSE.

At the NSE, it tumbled 13 per cent to the 52-week low of Rs 1,602.

The company's market capitalisation (mcap) eroded by Rs 37,720.8 crore to Rs 3,28,662.96 crore.

The stock emerged as the biggest laggard on both the BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty.

Cracking down on repeated non-compliance of IT norms, the RBI on Wednesday barred Kotak Mahindra Bank from on boarding new customers through its online and mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards with immediate effect after the regulator found "serious deficiencies" in the lender's IT risk management.

These actions, RBI said, are necessitated based on significant concerns arising out of Reserve Bank's IT examination of the bank for the years 2022 and 2023 and the continued failure on part of the bank to address these concerns in a comprehensive and timely manner.

Meanwhile, Kotak Mahindra Bank said in a statement that it has taken measures for adoption of new technologies to strengthen its IT systems and will continue to work with RBI to swiftly resolve balance issues at the earliest.

Kotak Mahindra Bank has been directed "to cease and desist", with immediate effect, from onboarding of new customers through its online and mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards.

"The bank shall, however, continue to provide services to its existing customers, including its credit card customers," RBI said. *—PTI*

The stock emerged as the biggest laggard on BSE & Nifty PHOTO: PTI

- Bank has been directed "to cease and desist", with immediate effect, from onboarding of new customers through its online and mobile banking channels and issuing fresh credit cards

SBI, Nestle, NTPC, ITC were among major gainers PHOTO: PTI

Markets extend gains for 5th day, Sensex revisits 74K

MUMBAI, 25 APRIL

Rising for the fifth straight session, equity benchmark Sensex rallied nearly 500 points to reclaim the 74,000 mark while the Nifty closed above the 22,550 level on Thursday, driven by heavy buying in banking, financial and metal stocks.

Recovering after a sell-off in early trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 486.50 points or 0.66 per cent to settle at 74,339.44. During the day, it surged 718.31 points or 0.97 per cent to 74,571.25.

The NSE Nifty advanced 167.95 points or 0.75 per cent to 22,570.35.

From the Sensex basket, Axis Bank jumped 6 per cent after the company reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 7,599 crore during the March 2024 quarter.

State Bank of India, NTPC, Nestle, Sun Pharma, JSW Steel, ITC, Mahindra & Mahindra and HCL Technologies were among the other major gainers.

Hindustan Unilever, Titan, Bajaj Finance, Maruti and Asian Paints were the other laggards.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled lower while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended in the positive territory.

European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.06 per cent to USD 88.07 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,511.74 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark rose 114.49 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 73,852.94 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty advanced 34.40 points or 0.15 per cent to 22,402.40. *—PTI*

Resilient economy to support India's growth: FinMin report

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Resilient growth, price stability and steady external sector outlook continue to support India's promising economic performance amid uncertain global conditions, a Finance Ministry report said on Thursday.

Overall, India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy, with positive assessments of the growth outlook for the current financial year for India by international organisations and RBI, the Monthly Economic Review for March said.

IMF, in its April 2024 World Economic Outlook (WEO), has revised upwards its estimate of India's real GDP growth for FY24 to 7.8 per cent from 6.7 per cent in its January 2024 update and 6.3 per cent in its October 2023 WEO.

The report said the global economic growth landscape is seeing a gradual resurgence, marked by fading fears of recession and rebounding growth in major economies.

Geopolitical tensions remain a concern, but notwithstanding recent developments, risk perceptions have softened, offering a potential upside for growth, it said.

The report said it is underway in major economies, although disparities persist.

Global slowdown led to a moderation in India's merchandise exports and imports, it said adding that the slowing of trade has resulted in the merchandise trade deficit narrowing in FY2023-24, as exports have shown a smaller contraction than imports.

Owing to these developments, it said, India's current account deficit improved in the first nine months of 2023-24 compared to the corresponding period of the previous year.

India's capital inflows saw a significant turnaround in 2023-24, and its foreign exchange reserves reached an all-time high in March 2024, sufficient to cover 11 months of projected imports and more than 100 per cent of total external debt. *—PTI*

India continues to be fastest growing economy PHOTO: UNSPLASH

HINDUSTAN UNILEVER SHARES DIP 2 PER CENT

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Shares of Hindustan Unilever on Thursday dipped 2 per cent after the company reported a 1.53 per cent decline in consolidated net profit for the fourth quarter ended 31 March, 2024.

The company's stock declined 1.94 per cent to Rs 2,215.25 on BSE.

At the NSE, it went lower by 1.99 per cent to Rs 2,215.10 apiece.

FMCG major Hindustan Unilever on Wednesday reported a 1.53 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,561 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2024 due to factors such as deflation and softening of commodity prices. Net sales of Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) were almost flat to Rs 15,013 crore in the March quarter.

While HUL's total expenses were up 1.15 per cent to Rs 12,100 crore in the March quarter from Rs 11,962 crore a year ago.

The total income of HUL during the fourth quarter of the previous fiscal was flat at Rs 15,441 crore, as against Rs 15,375 crore a year ago. *—PTI*

Report unauthorised forex trading to ED: RBI

MUMBAI, 25 APRIL

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued a directive to banks regarding instances of unauthorised forex trading activities by certain entities.

RBI has noted that some entities are offering forex trading facilities to Indian residents, promising disproportionate or exorbitant returns.

Upon investigation, it was found that these unauthorised entities engage local agents to open accounts at various bank branches to collect money for margin, investment, and other charges. However, the transactions in these accounts do not align with the stated purpose for opening them.

The notification further adds "On investigation, it has been observed that to facilitate unauthorised forex trading, these entities have taken recourse to engaging local agents who open accounts at different bank branches for collecting money towards margin, investment, charges"

Furthermore, these entities are facilitating unauthorised forex transactions by allowing residents to remit or deposit funds in rupees using domestic payment systems like online transfers and payment gateways.

To curb such activities, the RBI has emphasised that no person should deal in or transfer any foreign exchange or foreign security to any entity not authorised by the RBI, except under general or special permission.

Moreover, banks are advised to inform their customers to engage in forex transactions only with authorised persons and on authorised ETPs. The RBI has urged banks to widely publicise the list of authorised persons and authorised ETPs available on its website. *—ANI*

Hyundai, Kia to make 1.5 million vehicles by 2025

Hyundai will also strengthen its SUV sales leadership PHOTO: PTI

GURUGRAM, 25 APRIL

Hyundai Motor India will enhance its production capabilities to one million units by 2025. Combined with Kia India, Hyundai Motor Group will be able to annually produce 1.5 million units in India by 2025.

Hyundai will celebrate its 30th anniversary in India in 2026. The Hyundai Motor Group will expand its EV line up too in India and create an EV ecosystem to accelerate customer uptake and expand charging infrastructure. The company will also strengthen its SUV sales leadership.

Hyundai's Pune plant will be operational by the second half of 2025. The production facility was acquired from GM last year. Hyundai Motor is upgrading the facility using smart manufacturing technology and system, to create a production hub capable of building more than 200,000 units annually.

Kia India will start producing its first local EV model in 2025, and new models will be launched as the EV industry grows. Kia also has plans to focus on building EV charging infrastructure in India.

With hiked production capability, Chennai plant now has a production capacity of 824,000 units. After its first sale in 2019, Kia India also grew into a major brand in SUV segment and sells over 2 lakh units annually. *—ANI*

- Kia India will start producing its first local EV model in 2025, and new models will be launched as the EV industry grows

Banks are to inform customers to trade with permission PHOTO: PTI

Nestle India Q4 net up 27 pc at Rs 934 cr on sales

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

FMCG major Nestle India on Thursday reported a 27 per cent increase in net profit at Rs 934 crore for the fourth quarter ended 31 March, 2024 on account of strong growth momentum across its product portfolio.

The company had reported a net profit of Rs 737 crore in the January-March quarter of 2022-23 fiscal. Revenue from operations rose to Rs 5,267 crore for the period under review, as against Rs 4,830 crore in the same quarter of financial year 2022-23.

India has emerged as the largest market worldwide for Maggi. The company noted that commodity prices are seeing unprecedented headwinds in Coffee and Cocoa with all-time high prices and an on-going price rally.

Cereals and grains are going through a structural cost increase backed by MSP while milk prices are expected to rise on account of expected harsh summer.

Nestle said its board approved execution of a definitive agreement to form a joint venture with Dr Reddy's Laboratories. The partners intend to bring together a global range of nutritional health solutions as well as vitamins, minerals and health supplements of Nestle Health Science. The joint venture is expected to become operational in the second quarter of the financial year 2024-25, subject to customary closing conditions, the FMCG firm said.

The board also approved the launch of Nespresso in India wherein the company will engage in the sale and distribution of the product (machines and capsules) through its distribution network, online channels, and boutiques. *—PTI*

SUGAR CONTENT ROW

FSSAI collects samples of Nestle's Cerelac

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Food safety regulator FSSAI on Thursday said it is in the process of collecting pan-India samples of Nestle's Cerelac baby cereals, amid a global report that claimed the company was adding higher sugar content in the product.

"We are collecting samples (of Nestle's Cerelac baby cereals) from across the country. It will take 15-20 days to complete the process," Food Safety and Standards Authority (FSSAI) CEO G Kamala Vardhana Rao said on the side-lines of an Assocham event on food fortification.

The move comes following concerns about alleged high sugar content in Nestle's baby food products expressed by both the consumer affairs ministry and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) after taking note of a global report published by Swiss NGO Public Eye.

The global report has claimed that Nestle sold baby products with higher sugar content in less developed South Asian countries including India, Africa and Latin American nations as compared to markets in Europe.

However, Nestle India has maintained that it never compromises on compliance and it has reduced added sugar in baby food products in India by up to 30 per cent depending on variants over the past five years. FMCG firms have introduced varieties of millet-based products in the last few years and they can further expand the basket of nutritional foods in the country, he added.

The CEO also unveiled an Assocham's knowledge report 'Fortifying India's Future: Significance of Food Fortification and Nutrition' on the occasion.

LT Foods Global Branded Business CEO Vivek Chandra, Shariqua Yunus of World Food Programme, Fortify Health CEO Tony Senanyake and Farm to Fork Solutions CEO Umesh Kamble also spoke about food fortification. *—PTI*

It will take 15 days to complete the process PHOTO: MYNESTLE.IN

- Nestle India has maintained that it never compromises on compliance and it has reduced added sugar in baby food products

French Open to reveal second retractable court

PARIS, 25 APRIL

The second retractable roof at Roland Garros will be inaugurated on the opening day of the French Open next month, organizers said on Thursday about a project planned with the Paris Olympics in mind. A ceremony for the roof over the 10,000-seat Suzanne Lenglen court will be held on May 26 when play starts in the main draws, tournament director Amelie Mauresmo said at a news conference. Even before the inauguration for the two-week tournament, the roof can be closed if rain comes during qualifying rounds on the six previous days. The main 15,000-seat Philippe Chatrier court has had a retractable roof since 2020. "It is a court that will help us a lot," Mauresmo said, calling it the "most visible new feature" of the 2024 tournament. —*AP*

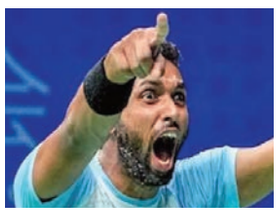


PHOTO: ANI

Shuttler Prannoy reveals chronic GI disorder

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Seasoned Indian shuttler HS Prannoy has revealed that he has been battling a chronic gastrointestinal disorder for the past four months which has not just hampered him physically but also taken a mental toll as he had fought these health issues not so long ago. Prannoy was diagnosed with gastroesophageal reflux disease during the 2018 World Championships, a chronic disorder that causes symptoms like heartburn, abdominal and chest pain, and inflammation of vocal chords. Prannoy's training and performance were affected by it in 2019-2020 but he had recovered from it and the after-effects of Covid-19 to slowly and steadily regain his place in the top echelons of men's singles. —*PTI*

Nikhil J, Nikeeta shine at Nat'l Autocross C'ship

MUMBAI, 25 APRIL

Nikhil J, supported by JK Tyre, clocked a blistering 1:25.094 to beat fancied Dhruva Chandrashekar who managed only 1:26.267 in the INAC1 800 to 1650cc class in the finals, while Nikeetaa Takkale, also of JK Tyre, excelled as a woman driver, in the FMSCI Indian National Autocross Championship 2024 (INAC) at the Nanoli Stud Farm on the outskirts of Pune. On Wednesday, the two fastest drivers in the class saw tough competition in the top INAC1 class. Hosted by the Indian Automotive Racing Club, the INAC witnessed an exhilarating display of speed and skill with the National champions decided in the finals. This is the first of the 12 Nationals organised by FMSCI which completed the Nationals 2024 and Indian champions were declared. —*ANI*

Madrid Open: Tormo fends off Svitolina's challenge

MADRID, 25 APRIL

Sara Sorribes Tormo added to her tally of upsets on home soil in the second round of the Madrid Open as she defeated No.16 seed Elina Svitolina on Thursday. Tormo came from a double breakdown in the second set to defeat No.16 seed Svitolina 6-3, 7-5 in a match that lasted for two hours andV 12 minutes. The two-time Madrid finalist registered a 6-3, 6-1 victory against Tatjana Maria in a match that lasted for one hour and 21 minutes. Sorribes Tormo's duel was exactly what he expected: an attritional battle in which the World No.55 gave nothing away. From 3-2 down in the opening set, Sorribes Tormo broke loose from the long series of deuce games, scoring 16 of the next 21 points to win. In the second set, she overcame a similar disadvantage before converting her third match point with a backhand pass. —*ANI*

AIFF records historic rise in women football

India has 27,936 registered female footballers

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

Indian football has recorded a massive 138 per cent surge in women's player registration in the last two years, indicating a healthy growth in the popularity of the sport as well as an increase in young female athletes opting for football professionally.

According to the All India Football Federation (AIFF) Central Registration System (CRS) data, India has 27,936 registered female footballers as of March 2024 -- up from the 11,724 female players registered in June 2022.

"It's a very positive trend we are witnessing in India," said AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey. "To have as many as 16,212 new female players in our football ecosystem is an encouraging sign that we are on the right track in our planning for the women's football in India."

Chaubey attributed the increase to a slew of measures including "course correction that was brought in for the Indian Women's League (IWL)" in the current season of 2023-24, in addition to the subsequent introduction of a second division competition IWL-2.

Indian football has recorded a massive 138 per cent surge in women's player registration in the last two years PHOTO: AIFF

"Availability of live broadcast has indeed helped in enhancing the profile of the sport," he added.

The 2022-23 season of IWL was played at a single venue in Ahmedabad among 16 teams, with Gokulam Kerala FC winning their third consecutive title. This season (2023-24) the format was changed to 'home-and-away'. Odisha FC emerged victorious ending Gokulam Kerala FC's three-year long dominance and will represent India in the AFC continental competition.

The inaugural IWL-2 saw participation of 15 clubs at the group stage, six of which have qualified for the final round scheduled next month in Kolkata. —*PTI*

With Olympics in mind, tennis player Yuki rejoins childhood coach

NEW DELHI, 25 APRIL

To make sure that he is ready for the Paris Olympics if an opportunity comes knocking, India's top player Yuki Bhambri has rejoined forces with childhood coach Aditya Sachdeva. World number two Rohan Bopanna, being a top-10 player, will have the choice of choosing his partner at the Paris Games and Yuki, who is the next best Indian on the ATP ranking chart at number 56, wants to be ready for the Games in best possible manner. Till Yuki was an active singles player, he had trained with Stephen Koon in Bangkok. However, when he gradually switched to the doubles, the Delhi player trained with sister Ankita in his home city and also got support through the 'Doubles Dream' -- an initiative of Bopanna to support the country's doubles players by providing them travelling coaches and physios. The rankings on 10 June will be considered as cut-off for direct entries. Top-10 players will have the choice of picking their partners.

Interestingly, Yuki has also taken up the role of mentor at RoundGlass where he will guide the U-14 group during his training stint. —*PTI*

Pakistan Hockey crisis: FIH issues ultimatum

KARACHI, 25 APRIL

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) has asked the Pakistan government and the two parallel bodies haggling over control of the sport in the country to resolve their differences by Thursday, failing which they could be suspended.

According to a Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) official based in Karachi, the FIH had made it clear that the feud between the two bodies "should be resolved today" (25 April) with the help of the government, or Pakistan could face suspension from events.

In a letter written to the PHF, the FIH has set 25 April as the deadline for Pakistan to decide on which body should govern the sport in the country and represent them at international level.

The FIH has made it clear if the feud was not resolved immediately, Pakistan may not be allowed to participate in the forthcoming Sultan Azlan Shah Cup (May 4-11, Malaysia) and the Nations Cup (May 31-June 9, Poland).

The organisers of the Azlan Shah Cup event have asked for guidance from the FIH although the PHF body headed by Shehla Reza, which is operating out of an office in Karachi, announced the Pakistan squad for the tournament on Wednesday. The parallel federations, one headed by Tariq Hussain Bugti and the other by Raza, contacted the hosts for sending their teams to represent Pakistan.

The Bugti-led body has already called up renowned Dutch coach Roelant Oltmans to Islamabad to prepare the national team for the two events. —*PTI*

FIH PHOTO: X/@FIH

PREMIER LEAGUE

Sheffield United acknowledges the crowd after their defeat against Manchester United by 2-4 at Old Trafford on Wednesday PHOTO: X/@SHEFFIELDUNITED

Starc bowling against Punjab under spotlight

KOLKATA, 25 APRIL

- Sunil Narine (286 @176.54 SR) and Phil Salt (249 @169.38 SR) have been phenomenal at the top, Andre Russell (155 @184.52), skipper Shreyas Iyer have all been among the runs

Mitchell Starc will be desperate to justify his USD 3 million price tag as Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) bowling unit try to find ways to be less profligate when it is pitted against a perennially under-achieving Punjab Kings in an IPL match here on Saturday.

KKR is currently second in the 10-team table with 10 points, four behind table toppers Rajasthan Royals (14 points) and the team's success is largely due to the batting efforts from the top-order. In Punjab Kings, they meet a side that has been inconsistent and despite two good finds in Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma, they haven't exactly done well during key moments and like every other year, they are all but out of play-off contention.

Sunil Narine (286 @176.54 SR) and Phil Salt (249 @169.38 SR) have been phenomenal at the top, Andre Russell (155 @184.52), skipper Shreyas Iyer (190 @126.66) have all been among the runs. Even Rinku Singh, who has just faced 67 balls in 7 games has a strike-rate of close to 160.

Save captain Iyer, all the specialist batters have scored at a strike-rate northwards of 150 and that has been instrumental in the Shah Rukh Khan co-owned team posting four 200-plus totals in their seven games so far.

Only Venkatesh Iyer's poor form has stuck out like a sore thumb and Nitish Rana's finger fracture has not only robbed KKR of a master player of spinners but also a very handy off-break bowler. However the same can't be said about the bowling unit where Narine with his immaculate line and length is the only person, who has been able to maintain an economy rate of just above 7.10 which is brilliant in times when 'Impact Player' is in vogue.

But it is Starc, whose underwhelming performance (6 wickets at ER 11.48) is the worst among the specialist bowler. At an all-time high price tag of Rs 24.75 crore (USD 3 million), Starc must be feeling the heat but to be fair to him, some of the tracks, including the one at the Eden Gardens have been perfect belters where length balls are soaring into the stands.

Compared to Starc, uncapped India pacers Harshit Rana (ER 9.25, 9 wickets) and Vaibhav Arora (9.57, 7 wickets) have been more impressive but they have also got hit at times. —*PTI*

Kolkata Knight Riders Mitchell Starc and Andre Russell during a practice session ahead of their match on Thursday PHOTO: ANI

TODAY'S MATCH

PUNJAB KINGS vs KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Eden Gardens

Kolkata

Olympic trials: Arjun Babuta sets world record in shooting

New Delhi, 25 April

Arjun Babuta breached the existing finals world record (FWR) in men's 10m air rifle on way to a commanding win in the ongoing Olympic Selection Trials (OST) 1&2 for Rifle and Pistol at the Karni Singh Range on Thursday. Babuta, 25-year-old Paris Olympics quota winner, shone with a sensational tally of 254.0 in the OST T1 final. The score was 0.3 above the mark set by fellow finalist and India teammate Divyansh Singh Panwar at the Cairo World Cup earlier this year. The men's 10m air pistol final saw Paris quota holder Varun Tomar secure yet another comfortable victory, with a score of 244.1. Ravinder Singh (240.0) was 4.1 points behind in second, while Varun's fellow Paris quota holder Sarabjot Singh (217.4) picked up the final podium spot. In the men's and women's 50m rifle 3-positions OST T2 qualification round, Olympians Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Anjum Moudgil topped the scoring charts. —*PTI*

ARCHERY WORLD CUP

India recurve team sets final clash with S Korea

SHANGHAI, 25 APRIL

The Indian men's recurve archery team of Tarundeep Rai, Dhiraj Bommadevara and Pravin Jadhav secured a berth in the finals at the ongoing Archery World Cup in Shanghai on Thursday.

They beat Italy 5-1 to set up a title clash with South Korea, which is scheduled for Sunday. The top-seeded South Korean team will feature Tokyo Olympic gold medalist trio Kim Woojin, Lee Woo Seok and Kim Je Deok.

As per the Archery Association of India (AAI), the team has improved its world ranking which will help them secure a spot in the Paris 2024 Olympics taking place early this year.

Indian women's recurve trio of Deepika Kumari, Ankita Bhakat and Bhajan Kaur faced a 3-1 defeat to Mexico in its opening clash. India did well in compound archery as well, securing a final spot in the men's and women's team events.

The women's team of Jyoti Surekha Vennam, Aditi Gopichand Swami, Parneet Kaur, Parneet Kaur secured a spot in the finals with a win over Estonia by 235-230. On the other hand, the men's team of Prathamesh Fuge, Abhishek Verma and Priyansh also moved to the finals, beating South Korea by 235-233.

Archery World Cup's first stage will be held from 23 to 28 April in Shangai while South Korea will be hosting the second leg from 21 to 26 May. Based on the performances in the first two stages of the WC, the team for the third stage, taking place from 18 to 23 June, in Antalya will be selected. The third stage of the World Cup will be the final qualification event for recurve archers ahead of the Olympics, taking place from July to August this year. —*ANI*

FIFA seals ties to Saudi with WC sponsor deal

ZURICH, 25 APRIL

- Saudi Arabia was confirmed as the only candidate by the end of that month

International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) deepened its ties to Saudi Arabia by confirming a sponsorship with the kingdom's state oil firm Aramco on Thursday. The deal was expected and became inevitable once Saudi Arabia was all but sealed last October as the 2034 host of the men's World Cup.

The deal through 2027 includes the men's World Cup in 2026 co-hosted by the United States of America, Canada and Mexico and the 2027 Women's World Cup. The hosts of that tournament will be decided next month.

The value of the deal was not disclosed but is likely the richest ever for FIFA by average annual value. It could include the inaugural 32-team Club World Cup being hosted next year in the US.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has built close ties with Saudi Arabia and its Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman since before the 2018 World Cup. That tournament in Russia was sponsored by state energy firm Gazprom.

Saudi Arabia was confirmed as the only candidate by the end of that month.

The Visit Saudi tourist board was a low-level sponsor of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, though not at the 2023 Women's World Cup following pushback by organizers in Australia and New Zealand. —*PTI*

READY FOR NEXT CHALLENGE

D Gukesh thanks his coach for success

CHENNAI, 25 APRIL

Indian chess prodigy D Gukesh on Thursday thanked the legendary Viswanathan Anand for playing a huge role in shaping his career, saying "I wouldn't have been close to what I am now if it wasn't for him".

The 17-year-old Grandmaster scripted history on Monday by winning the Candidates Chess Tournament in Toronto to become the youngest ever challenger to the world title, beating a record created by the legendary Garry Kasparov 40 years ago.

The triumph paved the way for Gukesh's clash against reigning world champion Ding Liren of China later this year.

"Vishy sir has been a huge inspiration for me and I have heavily benefitted from his academy. I am truly grateful to him and wouldn't have been close to what I am now if it wasn't for him," Gukesh said at a press conference a few hours after his arrival here to a rousing reception from fans and schoolmates.

Candidates champion Indian Chess grandmaster Dommaraju Gukesh with his mother on his arrival at the Chennai Airport, in Chennai PHOTO: PTI

Gukesh has trained at the Westbridge-Anand Chess Academy which came into existence in 2020. Incidentally, before Gukesh, Anand was the only Indian to have won the Candidates, the last time being 2014.

Speaking about his much-anticipated clash against Liren, Gukesh said, "The biggest challenge against Ding would be how I prepare myself and being in the right state of mind since it will be a big match. "There are a lot of expectations and a lot at stake. I have full belief in myself and will be going in with the same strategy. Hopefully, it will work out well."

The history-making teen was swamped by fans as he returned to an enthusiastic reception early this morning. Hundreds of students from the Velammal Vidyalaya, the school where Gukesh studies, lined up at the airport at least one hour before his flight landed to greet him. —*PTI*